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Dance and Poetry: from Movement to Word

Nadia Zulem Olguín Carrillo

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Theatre

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ABSTRACT

Dance and poetry have always been intrinsically intertwined. Both are temporal arts and share the capacity of representing, symbolising, depicting, and generating fictional worlds. They are born from the necessity or delight of communicating worldviews that go beyond what it can be explained with functional human languages. Although the relationship between dance and literature has always been a subject of interest for writers, critics, philosophers, and artists, the number of research studies focused on poetry about dance is relatively low. This thesis aims to analyse the nuances of the relationship between these art forms. To explain how their languages are related, ten poems from the Hispanic, English, and American worlds in the twentieth century whose central topic is the dancer Isadora Duncan (San Francisco, 1877-Nice, 1927) were selected. The focus of this thesis is on the poems' formal structure, their rhetorical resources, and on the images evoked through the symbolism of the art of dance, the choreographic work, and the figure of the dancer. To achieve this, the poetic works are analysed through the ancient Greek concept of ekphrasis. This is a rhetorical and discursive method whose objective is to verbalise an artistic, cultural, or sensorial entity, by describing it meticulously and interpreting it, adding depth of meaning. Additionally, through the review of the socio-historical context of each poem, this work provides an alternative dance history based on the elements that writers portrayed in their texts and on the social networks that connected the selected poems and Isadora Duncan. This thesis presents an approach to dance through the mental images and sounds that a poem can create in the reader's mind. Moreover, it emphasises the literature's capacity to preserve the essence of an otherwise ephemeral art.

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate the present thesis to my parents, Ana and Gerardo, and to Haydn Barradell. I am not able to express how thankful I am to you. Thanks for being by my side every time I start a new project and for never stopping to encourage me to reach my goals, no matter how impossible they seem to be.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Nadia Zulem Olguín Carrillo DATE: January 2021

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DANCE AND POETRY: FROM MOVEMENT TO WORD

*Dance has been described
as poetry in motion*

Emily Fragos, The Dance, 2006

Dance and literature have always nourished each other in multiple ways. Literary works have been the pre-text of choreographies and dance has had a role in stimulating literary creation. Although dance and poetry do not have the same projection capacity or the same figurative abilities, dancers, choreographers, and poets produce complex works with limitations, but also with representational scopes created from a mutual encounter. On the one hand, the limitation of a verbal text is that it lacks the capacity of corporeity (we cannot hold the written nor oral words with our hands) but has the potential of being perdurable and it can be performed by a body or bodies. On the other hand, a dance work¹ is ephemeral since it only lasts the performance, but a writer may try to ‘hold’ the movements and inscribe them into a long-lasting verbal text. This is one of the ways in which dance and literature have developed mutually, giving as a result embodied literary works and inscribed dance works.

Ritual, social, and concert dance can figure across literary genres because it can represent both movement and states, as well as symbolise, synthesise, and create realities. For example, Robinson Jeffers included the theme of ritual dance in his poem ‘New Mexican Mountain’ (in Fragos 2006, p. 145) to represent the advantages and disadvantages of western civilisation within the American natives from Taos Town, who never waive the practice of their ancestral ceremonies. In this poem, Jeffers declares that Taos men dance to help the growth of the young corn crop, referring to one of the native’s rituals for life sustainability. In turn, social dance has served many novelists as a mechanism for an encounter between characters, such

¹ Throughout this thesis I will refer to dance works (dance performances) as dance texts understanding ‘text’ within the framework of Roland Barthes’ approach that everything, from paintings to objects, practices and people, can be studied as a text, and ‘text’ understood in its pure meaning from the Latin *texere/texto*, which, in its participle form, means ‘woven’. In this sense, a dance work can be referred as a text since it contains layers of meaning woven between them that can be explored or analysed by their spectator. The spectator’s function, following Barthes’ propositions for text, is the same as that of the reader who does not consume the text passively but produces it and completes its meaning (1971).

as the one between Emma Bovary and the Vicomte during the dance organised by Marquis Andervilleirs at the Château de la Vaubyessard in Gustav Flaubert's novel (Flaubert 2014, Chap. XIII). As in *Madame Bovary*, dance, as a communal showpiece, has been a political activity in which the high society can establish their social status; and the dance room, besides being a common space in which the members of a community express their emotional states and share attitudes and values—including material assets— (Dallal 2007, p. 50), is an environment for love conquest. For their part, performances of dancers on stage or in a rehearsal room have worked for some writers as a metaphor for the creative act, as in Robert Burns' 'On Maria Dancing' (in Fragos 2006, p. 49), in which Maria's foot is able to speak and create a poetry that shames the musician. Dance is capable of, as Susanne Langer asserts, creating 'virtual realm[s] of power—not actual, physically exerted power, but appearances of influence and agency created by virtual gesture'² (1953, p. 175). In this realm, the dancer becomes a communicating subject, just as the poet, who is also a communicating subject able to inaugurate universes framed in a literary work.

The three cases outlined above exemplify different ways in which three writers used dance in their works. This thesis aims to explain how dance language and literary language are intertwined and the results of this encounter in terms of poetic creation. I selected this research topic due to personal and professional interests. I have studied and practised professionally Classical and Mexican Folkloric dance for 15 years and I have dedicated eight years to the study of literature. During this time, questions and reflections have arisen about the elements that unite these two disciplines. For this reason, my main objective is to recognise the artistic elements by means of which writers have been able to translate dance language into poetic form.

The modern dance-poetry relationship has been studied from many different angles. One of which is from a semiotic perspective which argues that, although language is involved in virtually everything we do or know, that does not mean that everything depends on linguistic

² 'Every being that makes natural gestures is a center of vital force, and its expressive movements are seen by others as signals of its will. But virtual gestures are not signals, they are symbols of will. The spontaneously gestic character of dance motions is illusory, and the vital force they express is illusory; the "powers" (i.e. centers of vital force) in dance are created beings—created by the semblance gesture' (Langer 1953, p. 175).

representation. It is indisputable that verbal language is involved in dance. For example, the technical vocabulary of dance is made of words, there are linguistic labels in the world of dance, and when a dance teacher explains movements to his students, verbal language is involved. Even these verbal explanations can involve metaphors, that is, the choreographer or dance teacher gives the instructions using metaphors so that the student or dancer understands what they should represent with their dance. However, there are dance movements that simply cannot be represented linguistically and, furthermore, the dances 'bespeak human modes of awareness that verbal languages do not adequately deliate' (Whittock 1997, p. 276). Likewise, in dance, not everything is representation, but the dancers' movements can be vehicles of metaphors because metaphors are a way of thinking, they are not only a rhetorical game belonging to the domain of verbal language. This approach to dance considers that it is essential to interpret dance always taking into account the dimensions of meaning provided by dance metaphors, that is, non-linguistic metaphors that challenge verbal labels in dance.

Another interdisciplinary way to approach dance is from phenomenology. Phenomenology is a method to describe human experience and the way human experiences themselves within the world they are immersed in. For this reason, phenomenology can work as a method for the descriptive study of dance if dance is considered a kinetic phenomenon, which includes a temporality, whose phenomenological nature has been studied by Martin Heidegger and later by Jean-Paul Sartre, and a spatiality, whose phenomenological nature has been analysed by Merleau-Ponty (see Sheets-Johnstone 1980). Phenomenologically, the nature of dance form can be described because man is capable of living it as both a formed and a performed experience.

For their part, Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason propose in *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (2012) an approach to dance through kinesthetic empathy. Kinesthetic empathy is an interdisciplinary concept that describes the ability that we have to experience empathy just by seeing another human being moving. The disciplines that can be involved in the Kinesthetic study range from psychology, philosophy, movement therapy, neuroscience, and technology. This analytical method allows us to deeply understand

communication and social interactions within the performing arts, music, film, sports, and sciences. Kinesthetic empathy focused on dance has its basis in the phenomenological study of dance but also has, as background, the work of the dance critic John Martin, who in the 1930s studied the relationship between the dancer and their audience. Today, researchers focused on kinesthetic empathy apply new knowledge from the field of neuroscience to explain the mirror neuron system, which comes into play when two subjects communicate through a motor-based understanding.

Lucia Ruprecht, in *Gestural Imaginaries: Dance and Cultural Theory in the Early Twentieth Century* (2019), develops gestural theory through investigation and analysis of literary and philosophical texts, photographs, and dances. Ruprecht proposes that modern dance meant a gestural revolution insofar as it is a wealth of knowledge of the past and the present. Gesturality is defined as an 'enhanced expressiveness of the entire body, gesturality restored inherent meaning to, and therefore confirmed the status of dance as art' (Ruprecht 2019, p. 23). In the field of choreography, the gesture is transmitted through photography. Thus, a dialogue between movement and the static image is established. Ruprecht relies on Benjamin Franklin's gesture theory to define the choreographic gesture captured in photography as an interruption of the flow of movement, which considers the dance image a gesture that can open philosophical musings and can reveal political insights. Ruprecht, in order to analyse how it is that performance arts, literary discourses, and philosophical reflections offer spaces for expression and reflection and therefore have equally great potential for imaginary and great critical weight, takes into consideration theoretical and historical issues of gestural thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière, the theories of thinkers like Theodor Adorno and Sigmund Freud, and the reflections of choreographers who wrote about their own art, such as Vaslav Nijinsky and Clotilde Sakharoff.

In a similar way, Carrie Preston, in *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (2011), explores the connections between dance, theatre, philosophy, and literature by tracing the semiotics of gesture from Romanticism to the twentieth century. She focuses on the associations between the 'old' elements of modernist art in order to identify what was not actual 'new' in Modernism. Preston also dedicates a chapter to discuss gender

issues involved in performance arts. Furthermore, Preston opens a discussion about the kinesthetic responses to static forms like literature and dedicates two chapters to Isadora Duncan's art and its political and feminist implications, and a final chapter to reflect upon Hilda Doolittle's poetry and the mind-body duality that she suggested in her dramatic monologues like 'Eurydice'.

As we can see, we can approach modern dance-poetry duality from different interdisciplinary methodologies. Each methodology will have advantages and disadvantages when we try to understand the relationship between literature and dance within the modernist movement. For this thesis, I chose to approach the dance-poetry relationship through an ekphrastic analysis of poetry of dance. Likewise, the ekphrastic approach to dance and poetry represents benefits but also limitations when trying to identify the ways dance and literature dialogued during the twentieth century.

When dance poetry is analysed from an ekphrastic perspective, we can consider that each poem was created with the intention of preserving a dance event. Dance, in its quality of temporal and spatial art, once performed, vanishes. The instrument that can most faithfully make us see a dance again would be the video camera. However, we do not have enough footage of the dance of the early twentieth century and, particularly, of the dancer and choreographer that I am interested in addressing in this thesis, Isadora Duncan, that gives us a lucid idea of what her choreographies were like and how she performed them. What remains of her, among other artistic forms such as sketches and photographs, are poems that include descriptions of her art and of her figure as dancer. These descriptions, from an ekphrastic perspective, were written to 'make us see' what the poet saw on stage. Likewise, in these poems we can read the impressions that the dancer left on her spectator/poet if we approach these poems with the ambition of analysing the aesthetic experience of the author. For this reason, I consider that a poem about Isadora Duncan analysed from an ekphrastic perspective serves as a testimony of an artistic event that, if it had not been captured in words, would probably be little known to the world.

The ekphrastic analysis of dance poetry has clear limitations. Firstly, although the poetic text offers an interpretative and creative point of view—and sometimes even critical—of a dance event, we cannot consider it as a faithful testimony of reality since the poem will highlight only what the poet wanted to preserve from their experience in front of the dance act. Therefore, although dance poems help us to elucidate what happened in the world of dance in the past century, they will have limitations as historiographical documents. In addition to this, the poem will reflect the particular—or generalised—perception of the figure of Isadora Duncan, which, as we will see throughout this thesis, has been ‘monumentalised’ by the history of dance. Thus, although an ekphrasis aspires to be a verbal translation of a non-verbal text, there are aspects of the dance that simply cannot be translated to linguistic signs. Despite this, the results of this attempt to translate dance into words are metaphorical, symbolic, and rhetorical games that are worth analysing. It is precisely due to these results, and due to the ekphrasis’ capacity to translate a non-verbal event into a verbal text, that I consider it relevant to approach the dance-poetry relationship from the ekphrastic methodology.

Methodology

To objectively study the relationships between dance and poetry I selected ten poems by Hispanic, English, and American writers from the twentieth century whose main topic is the dancer Isadora Duncan (San Francisco, 1877-Nice, 1927). Duncan is known for her innovations in dance practice and philosophy and is considered one of the founding pillars of modern dance. Duncan stated that classical dance was inharmonious to the body. For instance, she created the basis for a more free, natural, and expressive dance to expose the feelings and thoughts of the practitioner. Her main sources and models were ancient Greek artistic and cultural expressions reflected in vases, sculptures and murals: ‘I drew my inspiration from Greek sources. Strictly speaking, I do not try to reconstruct Greek dances. This is practically impossible’ (Duncan *apud* Daly 1995, p. 101). Even when she did not create a dance technique, her relevance in the dance world lays in her efforts to establish dance as a non-restrictive art in terms of themes, scenography, costumes, sources of inspiration, the potential of the body, and correlations with other type arts. Regarding the latter, Duncan was convinced that the inclusion of innovations that were taking place in other

artistic expressions such as painting, photography, music, and technology in dance staging were vital for the regeneration of all artforms. Thus, as happened in most arts at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, Duncan, as a creator and performer, worked in the renewal of the methods, techniques, and effects of her art (Dallal 2007, 61-62).

The ten selected poems are suitable for an ekphrastic analysis because in them it is possible to identify different rhetorical resources within them that construct vivid descriptions of Duncan's movements and stage presence in which the poet takes the role of spectator/reader of the dance act. Likewise, as spectators, the poets, in these poems, offer an account of the sensations and impact that the dancer's performance had on them, that is, these poems are a testimony of the aesthetic experience of some of the artists who saw Duncan dancing. In addition, some poems offer an interpretation that explains what Isadora Duncan probably aimed to convey and represent with her dance. This interpretation can be classified as a pictorial translation within the ekphrastic theory.

The literary works in which the figure of Isadora Duncan and her art are a prominent element are not limited to the 10 poetic works that I selected for the study of ekphrasis of dance in this thesis. The selection of these poems in particular was due to the fact that, using them, a chronology of the artistic life of Isadora Duncan can be traced, from her first performance in Paris in 1903, a performance that prompted Ruben Darío to write his poem of 1907; going through the years in which Duncan continued with the development of a dance aesthetic that aspired to a revaluation of the values of ancient Greece, an aesthetic that is reflected in the poems of Louis Untermeyer of 1914 and of Witter Bynner of 1920; continuing over the years in which Duncan reinforced her theory of a dance art whose source of inspiration was the movements of nature, movements that are described by Carl Sandburg in his poem published posthumously in 1978; and ending with the poems by David Huerta and Armando Rubio from the 1980s that depict the decease of the dancer and highlight the impact that her peculiar death had on the artistic world even decades after it occurred.

The selection of Latin American, American, and European poems was made with the purpose of emphasising the importance of Isadora Duncan around the world, since she was a dancer

and creator whose dance philosophy and message of to ‘make over human life, down to its least details of costume, of morals, of way of living’ (Duncan 1977, p. 101) crossed borders and reconfigured the expressive purposes of the art of dance in the twentieth century. Thus, these poems highlight the innovations of the modern dance age in the American and European continents and therefore work to some extent as historiographical supporting documents useful to trace a history of modern dance told by eyewitnesses of Duncan’s dance.

Corpus of Work

The poems selected are as follows: ‘La bailarina de los pies desnudos’ (1907) by Rubén Darío (Metapa, Matagalpa, 1867-León, 1916); ‘Isadora Duncan Dancing (Iphigenia in Aulis)’ and ‘Isadora Duncan Dancing (Chopin)’ (1914) by Louis Untermeyer (New York City, 1885-Newtown, 1977); ‘To Isadora Duncan’ (1917) by John Cowper Powys (Derbyshire, 1875-Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1963); ‘Isadora Duncan’ (1918) by Max Eastman (New York City, 1883-Bridtown, Barbados, 1969); ‘An Ode to a Dancer (Isadora Duncan) (1920)’ by Witter Bynner (New York City, 1881-Santa Fe, 1968); ‘To Isadora Duncan, Dancing’ (1924) by Joel Elias Spingarn (New York City, 1875-1939); ‘Isadora Duncan’ (1978, posthumous work) by Carl Sandburg (Illinois, 1878-Falt Rock, 1967); ‘La bufanda de Isadora Duncan se trueca en el recuerdo’ (1980) by David Huerta (Mexico City, 1949), and ‘Isadora’ (1983, posthumous work) by Armando Rubio Huidobro (Santiago de Chile, 1955-Santiago de Chile, 1980).

Problem Statement and Hypothesis

The selected poems describe dance acts and the dancer’s figures, attempting to translate a non-verbal text into a verbal work. Furthermore, they are not limited to description, but may explain what the dancer’s movements and expressions mean and what sensations the poet experienced while or after watching the dance piece. Hence, my first thought was that these poetic pieces share features with texts in which the ancient Greek method known as ekphrasis was developed. Ekphrasis, in its beginnings, was a rhetorical exercise aimed to describe any object or human action. However, the concept of ekphrasis gradually specialised. Since the mid-twentieth century, it has been defined as a verbal representation of a pictorial work of art. Nonetheless, I state that ekphrasis aims to be a bridge between a non-verbal act or entity and the spoken or written word. Hence, I consider it as a discursive procedure in which a

work of art, an event, a cultural entity, or an object of perceptual reality is verbally described using rhetorical resources. Thus, the writer of ekphrasis composes a literary text focused on the visuality and sensations caused by the cultural and artistic objects that they perceived. Even if the writer writes about a fictional subject, their aim will be to meticulously describe it and to give an account of their aesthetic experience as if they really saw it. Considering that ekphrasis was used as a rhetorical method to write these poems, the following question arose: What are the benefits of analysing the poems as ekphrastic texts? I consider that the capacity of ekphrasis to translate a non-verbal text into a verbal text is why ekphrastic poems are relevant to the study of dance, since in an ekphrasis it is possible to capture an ephemeral event that, if it had not been recorded in word, would be lost. Thus, through literary texts, we can try to reconfigure evanescent artistic expressions that had no other recording method, like dance pieces before the introduction of camera technologies. By applying this Greek concept to the poems, I know which specific rhetorical resources were used and shared by the writers to translate a non-verbal text into verbal language. Furthermore, I can search and outline how poets appreciated an artistic expression that might seem to be completely unrelated to their own artistic labour. Therefore, when reading the poetic pieces that I selected, I asked myself, what were these authors trying to communicate through the symbolism intrinsic to dance? Primarily, I state that these poets have used dance as an aesthetic resource because through it, it is possible to communicate ideas about time, movement, freedom, music, creative acts, divinity, love, and art.

Subsequently, this question arose: Why have the selected poets chosen dance as a starting point for the creation of a poetic piece? In texts where dance is a core point, life and its stages can be represented with moving and static images whose medium of expression is verbal language. Dance gives visibility to the movement of life and its circumstances. Therefore, theorists such as Dolores Ponce refer to 'Dance as a symbol', since 'literature uses dance for its synthetic suitability (in which the description of the dance is not necessary but the mention of the word is sufficiently expressive)' (2010, p. 12). Thus, the word 'dance' may explicitly or implicitly express more than one thing at the same time. Simply including 'dance', the poet uses a more economical and imagistic way to present ideas about movement and rhythm, for instance, to the reader.

After a chronological review of my corpus I posed this question: How can we establish a chronology or history of early twentieth century modern dance through the analysis of poetry? Both dance and poetry went through similar artistic movements throughout the twentieth century which affected their modes of production. To respond more accurately to this, I researched the historical-cultural context of each poetic text indicating how their content is related to Isadora Duncan's philosophy and life.

Literature Review

With regards to previous studies combining dance and literature, there are some recent examples, such as Dolores Ponce's *Danza y literatura ¿qué relación?* (2013) in which the author explores the ubiquity of dance and movement in narrative literary works, analysing them with concepts from dance scholarship. *Danza y poesía. Para una poética del cuerpo* (2015), by Ivette Fuentes is a work in which the author considers poetic image as a significant movement of an idea that is between the signifier and the signified of a metaphor. *The Anatomy of Dance Discourse: Literary and Philosophical Approaches to Dance in the Later Graeco-Roman World* (2018) by Karin Schlapbach is another work in which the dialogic relationships between dance and literature in ancient times, as well as the ekphrastic resources used to relate these arts, are studied. The second half of Schlapbach's book is dedicated to ekphrastic analysis of texts by Xenophon, Plutarch, Atheneus, Longus, Apuleius, Nonnus, and Athenaeus that depict or reflect upon dance, making it a relevant resource for this project.

Since this project works with poems from Hispanic and English worlds, the incorporation of critical material in both Spanish and English was necessary to better understand existing literature on the relationships between dance and literature. To support my analysis, I drew from the following sources: 'Miss Isadora Duncan' (1903) by Rubén Darío, was helpful as a theoretical text, as the author deals with two key issues: how to represent dance in written form and the rhythmic relation between dance and poetry. *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (2013), written by Susan Jones, helped me to find the correlations between dance, choreography, and literature in the modernist period, as well as to understand how substantial

this dialogue was for the development of the aesthetics of both artistic expressions. The relevance of this book lays on its approach to Modernism and its emphasis of the importance of a culture of scholarship into dance research. Finally, *The Art of the Dance* by Isadora Duncan 1977 [1928], which is a compilation of her essays, was relevant to review Duncan's dance philosophy. By knowing Isadora's dance principles, a critical analysis of the poems could be done since they present the results of the dancer's ideas and reflections upon dance.

Regarding the concept of ekphrasis, Ruth Webb's 'Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre' (1999) and *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (2009) were useful since they explain the main changes in the concept of ekphrasis across time. Antonio Agudelo's article 'Los ojos de la palabra. Construcción del concepto de ékfrasis, de la retórica antigua a la crítica literaria' (2011) was helpful because it asserts that ekphrasis is a verbal representation of an object whose description becomes almost visual. This object may be a work of art or an object of the perceptible world, an event or something from empirical reality. Agudelo's thesis underpins my argument that not only a painting can be 'ekphrased' but also other kinds of art works, even temporary movement acts, can be the object of an ekphrastic text. Moreover, '*Ekphrasis como traducción visual y correspondencias literarias en el lenguaje pictórico desde "Museo interior"*' de José Watanabe' (2009) by Alberto Valdivia guided me to explain what an ekphrastic translation is and how a writer can put into words a non-linguistic text.

An archival research into Isadora Duncan unearthed photographs, videos, and drawings of her; articles and reviews of her performances; news and articles about her artistic and personal life; essays dedicated to Duncan and written by the chosen poets; notes on the musical repertory danced by Isadora and her pupils, and original writings by Duncan. Explored archives include The Isadora Duncan Archive, The Isadora Duncan Pandect; the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library; the Isadora Duncan Virtual Museum; Archive.org; the New York Times Archive, and the National Resource Centre for Dance of the University of Surrey.

Outline

The first chapter of this thesis, ‘The Verbalisation of Movement’, exposes the main strategies for verbal representation of visual facts (anything that is perceived through the sense of sight) in literary texts, as well as the reasons why poets use dance as an aesthetic resource that symbolises concerns of the human condition. The subchapter ‘Ekphrasis of Dance: Preserving an Ephemeral Act’ includes a review of the most relevant definitions of the concept of ekphrasis to select the most pertinent for the analysis of the selected poems. Moreover, the importance of musicality and rhythm in both poetry and dance is highlighted in this chapter. ‘The Chosen Dancer: Isadora Duncan in Poetry’, the second chapter, provides a review of key facts of early modern dance and poetry that were important for the development of their intertwined aesthetics during the twentieth century. The third chapter, ‘What Did Poets See in Isadora Duncan’ covers the analysis of form and content of the corpus of work and defines the selected poems’ common patterns and shared features. This chapter incorporates research around the social connections between Duncan and the poets that wrote about her.

I. THE VERBALISATION OF DANCE

The present chapter exposes the main reasons why writers have chosen the art of dance and the figure of the dancer as topics and starting points for their literary works. It establishes analogies between dancers, choreographers, and poets as creators who have similar artistic objectives. It explains the features that the languages of dance and poetry share, which of their characteristics differ, and how the blending of their constitutive elements has occurred. The second part is focused on the relevancy of rhythm in both art forms and why this element constitutes one of the avenues through which poetry and dance meet. Finally, the third section is a review of the mutating concept of ekphrasis and a definition of ekphrasis is proposed here.

Literature and dance have coexisted and fed each other even when they have their own expressive means. Maybe dance is older than poetry. Mankind has always had the need to expand his body expression beyond the movements that are useful for communicating primary ideas. Through movement people not only recreate what they have seen but try to objectify the subjective. Movement is a form of expression whose instrument, in the case of dance, is the human body. Dance and literature have been related for reasons ranging from the search for a theme or inspiration to the ability of both to represent feelings, states of mind, emotions, social encounters, love. Although these two arts have different constituent materials—literature's is words; dance's is the body—they share many aspects. In addition, as Rene Wellek states, 'it cannot be denied that the arts have tried to take effect on each other and that they have achieved it to a considerable extent'³ (1966, p. 150). Poetry causes similar prevocational effects to those of dance. However, the enjoyment produced by one or the other will always be different.

It can be considered that writers, choreographers, and dancers are poets in the strict and pure sense of the word. 'Poet', taken from the Greek *poētēs*, refers to the 'maker, creator'. It is a word derived from the verb *poiēō*, which means 'I do' (Corominas 1973, vox *poiēō*). Thus,

³ All translations Spanish-English from texts originally written in Spanish or translated into Spanish are my own.

although dance and poetry are different forms of expression, their creators can compose complete texts. Both create discourses that do not necessarily have utilitarian functions. When dancing, we make movements in which we spend so much energy and from which we obtain an insignificant result, contrary to what we obtain when making daily movements, where energy expenditure is minimal, but we try to obtain maximum performance. The same happens in literary discourse, which is a much more elaborate way of writing or of orality than we use to communicate daily. For instance, the language of ekphrastic poems is highly descriptive and these descriptions use rhetorical resources such as metaphors. Even when daily descriptions and verbal language in general incorporate metaphors, these metaphors do not aim to make language obscure nor break with a culture's conventional way of expression, but to aid the speaker/listener to understand a concept or experience in terms of another concept if the metaphor is coherent within the context—or cultural values⁴—in which it was used. Hence, dance and poetry do not aim to have a utilitarian function but to use precise and sophisticated ways of expression based on their codification systems and framed in the physical, expressive, and representational possibilities offered by the body and verballity.

Dance and literature are languages that communicate. They use signs to reach a goal. Just as the order of the words in a sentence or verse has an impact on the final meaning of a speech, in dance, each movement and the way it is organised in sequences determines the communicative objective. With the selectivity and disposition of these signs, writers, choreographers, and dancers create worlds and characters close to a code, a technique, a wealth of ideas, and a tradition. Both have expressive, symbolic, and technical features: the first, because they communicate ideas, feelings, emotions; the symbolic, because they transmit encrypted messages that must be decoded, and the technical, because they must carry out a procedure following norms and rules to achieve an objective. Both are languages 'in the sense of a generalised, global expressive, and communicative function of man' (Dorfles 2001, p. 299). In addition, neither of these two arts are conceived spontaneously, they are based on reflection stimulated by other human languages.

⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live by* (1980), discuss the fact that metaphors are not only embedded in our linguistic systems but also take an eminent place within our conceptual system (thought and action), and that the structure of these metaphors will be consistent with the fundamental values of each culture. However, as expected, the values of cultures, subcultures, and individuals change and therefore also the metaphors associated with them will change too.

With regards to their communication channels, these two arts differ. Dance has motor, visual and kinaesthetic channels and develops in temporal and spatial dimensions. Literature has vocal and graphic channels and develops in a linear temporal dimension. Therefore, the representational scopes of each are dissimilar. For example, literature is not able to transmit the energy radiated by the dancer when they appear on stage; however, it is able to hypothesise the intentions of the dancing subject. Dance, meanwhile, fails to convey a complete description but can represent a whole story and argument. An example of the latter is that dance, as a system of movements based on human experience, is not just an imitation of natural phenomena but also a representation arisen from verbal expression. Therefore, Susana Tambutti states:

The ‘representation’ in dance was based on the illustration of the word, whether they were stories from literature or narratives inspired by painting. Progress was manifested in the possibility of evolution of this form of imitation that was not a mimesis of nature but sought equivalence between the visual experience of dance and that provided by the word (Tambutti 2008, p. 16).

Even when dance and literature are dissimilar in some ways, both can represent the same object and can express similar ideas. Literature, both oral and written, has been the starting point for the creation of dance works since it adds a temporary value and a whole argument. Complete *ballets* have been created from books or part of them. This is a translation process that goes from verbal language to dance language. With respect to the opposite process, one that goes from dance to verbal language, the three great types of dance, namely, ritual, social and concert, have figured in all literary genres, from epics in ancient Greece like *The Iliad* or cosmogonic books such as the *Popol Vuh* book, passing through the gulf songs of Carmina Burana and Edgar Allan Poe's romantic tales like ‘The Mask of Red Death’.⁵

The human body has also been a topic of interest for writers. This, being the physical and sensory component of humankind, is a means of expression and cognition capable of representing, in a perceptible way, our thoughts, spirits, fantasies, desires. As Gilles Deleuze states, ‘The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, what it must overcome to think. On the contrary, it is that in which thought is submerged or must be

⁵ Sarah Webster and R.E. Goodwin studied the presence of dance in Ancient literature, from the Classic Antique to Decadent poets in *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*, 1988.

submerged to reach the unthinkable, that is, life' (1996, p. 251). The expressions that the body uses as a primary instrument do not separate the intelligible element from the sensitive one, but it is from this union that they create a language articulated in the space.

The domination of the body by the dancer causes fascination to those who observe. The dancer expands the capabilities of the body and exceeds those of the ordinary man to make significant movements in space. Paul Valéry, a French poet and philosopher contemporary to Duncan, asserted:

Man perceived that he possessed more vigor, more suppleness, more articular and muscular possibilities, than he needed to satisfy the needs of his existence, and he discovered that certain of these movements, by their frequency, succession, or range, gave him a pleasure equivalent to a kind of intoxication and sometimes so intense that only exhaustion, an ecstasy of exhaustion, as it were, could interrupt his delirium, his frantic motor expenditure (Valéry 1976, pp. 65-66).

Each movement and image that the dancer produces with their body will be unique, unrepeatable, ephemeral. Harmony Jankowski states that 'The fields of literature and dance cross-pollinated throughout the early twentieth century as they continue to today, with choreographers taking inspiration from literary texts and writers using dancers—particularly modern dancers—as ways of drawing attention to corporeality and mobility (broadly defined) in their texts' (2015, p. 83). In this way, fugacity, mobility, and embodiment are the dancer's main qualities that fascinate writers since they impose upon themselves the challenge of recording moving fleeting actions, add them depth of meaning, and thus state them into words: 'The first function of the word is to immobilize the perception at a certain level of intelligibility [...] The second function of the word is that of knowledge [...] language adds *knowledge* to the image' (Barthes 1967, p. 24). These two are some of the functions that the writer aims to achieve while transcribing the moving body into words.

Regarding poetic language, Dolores Ponce asserts that 'In poetry from very different times, dance and the figure of the dancer appear as metaphors of the encounter, of the aesthetic act, of the poetic voice, of renewal, of cosmic harmony, among others' (2010, p. 107). Moreover, the ubiquity of dance and dancers in poetry is not only because their actions could work as

metaphors. Dance can also be the element that determines the character of a poem, and even the reason why the poet decides to write a piece or a whole collection of poems.

Stéphane Mallarmé's theory around the analogy of dance and writing asseverates that the figure of the dancer works as a metaphor and her movements can be read like signs by the poet whose function is that of the reader. However, just like the linguistics signs of our codified semiotic system, the dancing sign must be composed by a signifier and a signified, and the dance steps are only signifiers that need their signified. Here is where the poet works choosing the signified for the signifier. Reacting intellectually to dance, the poet will complement the metaphors shown in the dance. This intellectual reaction will be the result of an attraction of the dancer to her reader's senses. Thus, the poet will be able to intellectually process his⁶ sensorial reaction to recreate it on paper, add extra meanings to the metaphors, and finally complement the other half of the dance work (Shaw 1988, p. 4). Hence, the dancing sign will be fully complete, in a symbiotic relation between dancer and poet.

Both dance and literature have their own coding system, creational resources and strategies, rhythm techniques, and history. However, they have always maintained a dialectical relationship. Even though one art does not determine the evolution of the other nor do they develop at the same speed, at certain historical moments they shared more creational methodologies and aims than we thought.

1.1 Ekphrasis of Dance: Preserving an Ephemeral Art

Dance has been a persistent motif in literary accounts from all latitudes and times. Present in novels, tales, or poems, dance with its performers have been included to communicate or to inaugurate the subject of a whole literary text. Naturally, every literary text is unique in content and form. However, as will be seen in the third chapter of this thesis, patterns can be

⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé refers to the poet as a male subject and to the dancer as a female by using the pronouns he/him and she/her respectively. Although this restrictive referring mode can be debated as it diminishes the work of female poets and/or male dancers, I decided to keep Mallarmé's structure, not only to preserve the essence of his ideas (in fact, one of his main witnessed dancers was Loïe Fuller), but because historically the majority of poets were males and dancers were females and because in the particular case of my thesis, all the chosen poets are men, and the observed dancer is a woman.

identified from simultaneous analysis of modern poems, from different parts of the world, written about Isadora Duncan. Exploring the common path that writers took to create their texts, I consider that poems whose main subject is dance, can be studied under an ekphrastic analysis.

Ekphrasis, whose Greek etymology is *ek*, 'out', and *phrasis* from the verb *phraso*, 'to speak', is an ancient concept that refers to a verbal description⁷ of a non-verbal text. The meaning of ekphrasis has narrowed over the centuries, going from the description of every natural and cultural phenomena, to the verbal representation of a work of art, and even further, of a plastic work of art. Dance is an art, however, when analysing ekphrastic poems of dance we cannot girdle to a restricted definition of ekphrasis but to a definition that joins ancient and modern conceptions.

The specialisation of the concept of ekphrasis as the description of a work of art was not set completely until the second half of the twentieth century. Ruth Webb traced the evolution of the meaning of ekphrasis and found that scholars from the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth, rarely used the concept applied to both modern and ancient Greek literature.⁸ According to Webb, a key event in the evolution of the concept can be found in J. D. Denniston's definition of ekphrasis as 'the rhetorical description of a work of art, one of the types of *progymnasma*' in the Oxford Classical Dictionary from 1949. This definition is followed by examples of ancient ekphrasis of sculptures. The source of this definition is *Reallexikon de klassischen Altertums*, published by Frederick Lübker in 1914. Lübker's definition of ekphrasis is the 'rhetorical description, *mostly* of a painting, one of the *Progymnasmata*'. The crucial difference between these definitions is the use of the adverb

⁷ The use of rhetoric resources is what makes an ekphrasis different from an ordinary description. A description is 'A statement or account which describes something or someone by listing characteristic features, significant details, etc.' (Oxford, *description*). While an ekphrasis is a description that performs a literary function through which certain characteristics of the pre-texts (characteristics that in many cases are not immediately visible) can be revealed.

⁸ An example of the gradual delimitation of this concept is Paul Friedländer's *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius: Kunstbeschreibungen Justinianischer Zeit* (1912). In the title of this work, the author used the word *kunstbeschreibung* (*kunst* = 'art' y *beschreibung* = 'description'). Under this term, he categorised texts from the Greek antiquity and from the byzantine era that we recognised as ekphrastic. For modern ekphrastic texts, Friedländer used the word *Bildbeschreibung*, which means 'description of a picture' (Webb 2009, p. 5). With these terms, he identified ekphrastic texts which are focused specifically on works of art and not on any other type of subjects.

mostly. Although Lübker highlights the ekphrasis of paintings, he states that paintings are just part of a larger group of subjects. However, Denniston does not qualify the definition with the adverb mostly but states that the subjects of ekphrastic texts are works of art. Ruth Webb notes that this subtle but significant change in the definition led the concept of ekphrasis to its modern restricted definition (Webb 2009, p. 7). In earlier periods, before the narrowing of meaning of ekphrasis, scholars took the ancient broad conception.

Merle Nudelman explains the process that she, as a poet, undertakes to write ekphrasis.⁹ Nudelman also provides a theoretical definition of ekphrastic poetry which I find accurate in many senses:

Ekphrastic poems are written for works of art—paintings, sculptures, music, dance, and film. These poems may interpret, describe, confront, address, respond, and otherwise engage with the subject piece. The earliest and best-known example of ekphrasis is the lengthy description of the shield given to Achilles that is found in Homer's *Iliad*. In ancient Greece ekphrasis was a term linked to the ability to describe something with vivid detail. In contemporary poems poets may include themselves in the poem by describing memories, feelings, and associations evoked by the piece thereby linking ekphrasis with the autobiographical tradition in poetry writing. Autobiographical information may be presented directly or indirectly and the description of the work of art may be limited and then augmented by elements of fact, consideration, and emotion drawn from the poet's personal experience (Nudelman, 2019, p. 3).

As Nudelman writes, the description of Achilles' shield in Chapter XVIII of Homer's *Iliad* is the most referred literary passage to exemplify an ekphrastic text. Homer, in the middle of the narration of a battle, inserted the description of Achilles' shield illustrating nine dynamic scenes. This descriptive passage inaugurated a model for the creation of texts that are at the service of pictorial representation. Homer's description not only depicts static objects but actions: A battle, a wedding ceremony, a litigation, a dance, to mention some of the scenes,¹⁰

⁹ Nudelman is part of a collaboration between the Canadian Long Dash Poetry Group and the Women's Art Association of Canada, and, during the last decade, she has written poems that respond to paintings.

¹⁰ The described scenes are the following: [1] The world, the sky, the seas, the constellations and the Moon (lines 484-489); [2] Two cities, in one of them a wedding is being celebrated and a litigation is taking place; the other city is being besieged and a battle is happening (lines 490-540); [3] A field that is being ploughed (lines 541-549); [4] A royal farm (lines 550-560); [5] A vineyard where maidens and young men are picking the fruit (lines 561-572); [6] A herd is being herded, and two lions are killing a bull (lines 573-586); [7] A meadow where sheep lie (lines 587-589); [8] A dance of maidens and young men (lines 590-606); [9] An ocean (lines 607-609).

are vividly included in the ekphrasis. The insertion of actions in Homer's text gives us an indication of the wide range of subjects that could be included in this kind of description in antiquity.

In *Progymnasmata*, the rhetoric exercises designed mostly by Hermogenes of Tarsus (c. II BCE), ekphrasis was already a term used to refer to a speech that makes an object something vivid and brings it before our eyes. Theon (1st century BCE) suggested people (*prosopa*), times (*chronoi*), places (*topoi*), and events (*pragmata*) as subjects of ekphrasis (Webb 1999, p. 11). The category of works of art as the subject of an ekphrasis was not particularly relevant. The nature of the object or subject described was not the most relevant feature of an ekphrasis, but the effect that that ekphrastic discourse was going to have on the reader. Namely, the creation of vivid mental images on the listener's mind to make them "see" the subject matter before the eyes' (Webb 2009, p. 2), was the writer's aim.

Nudelman also mentions the role of the poet's personal experience plays in the writing of an ekphrasis. This point is relevant when reading dance poetry. Besides the description of the dancer's body, movements, and costumes, the poet may include an account of the aesthetic experience that they had while or after having watched the performance: 'With the gesture of a god / You gave me back my love, / And tears deeper than tears / Overflowed my heart' (Powys 1917, lines 5-8); and 'Came the Springtime, making winter warm with dreaming— / Came (to thrill our pulses) Isadora Duncan' (Spingarn 1924, lines 3-4).

The fact that in most dance poems the poet has also watched the dance act, makes the writer an active force in the representation of dance. Karin Schlapbach, who focuses on dance discourse in ancient Greek literature, notes that a large amount of ekphrastic texts from antiquity aimed to relate the impact of the work of art on the viewer (2018, p. 13). The inclusion of the effect that the observed subject or object had on the poet is another strategy usually used for the creation of ekphrastic poems, and this resource is widely seen in dance poems.

The first sentence in Nudelman's definition lists the types of art that can motivate the writing of an ekphrasis. Although Nudelman includes all types of artistic expressions, including dance, the matter of an ekphrasis can involve a wider range of pre-texts. Following this conception of ekphrasis, I find Claus Clüver's definition of ekphrasis useful, which is 'the verbalisation of texts, real or fictional, made up of a system of non-verbal codes' (*apud* Artigas 2004, p. 22). This definition, although modern, is accurate since it involves Barthes' notion of text (see footnote 1) and highlights the nature of the two types of texts involved in ekphrastic practices, namely, the verbal—the literary text—and the non-verbal—which can be an event or any object from the perceptive reality.

As I stated in the Introduction of this thesis (p. 11), ekphrasis is a rhetorical method capable of recording ephemeral events, such as dance, in verbal language (oral or written). In *paragone*¹¹, artists and philosophers argued that painting was the most supreme of all arts. The posture taken on this debate, even nowadays, may depend on personal affections to a particular art. Naturally, in texts such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on painting*, pictorial art was going to hold dominance. However, even when painting is one of the arts demonstrating strongest communication skills, since it works from images, I strongly believe that literature has a big advantage over painting since it can survive and be transmitted from generation to generation without a material support. As Ruth Finnegan states, 'Voice is the supreme human quality', and this supremacy arises from the power of the word to communicate and to preserve issues of human condition and nature. Finnegan notes that sound is present all around the animal kingdom. Many animals are audio-visual beings whose voice and sense of vision are complemented by the other senses. However, humans have a voice that can be recorded in different ways. When word is in writing, we have a 'Text [that] is performance, not only a static page' (Finnegan, 2020). And if this written work is not burned nor destroyed, then it is going to last over time.

This quality of the verbal communication system is what makes poetry important for the study of dance. The poet, as spectator of a dance act, is capable to record in written or oral

¹¹ The Italian word *paragone* ('comparison') refers to the series of theoretical discussions that sixteenth-century Italian, Flemish, and Dutch thinkers and artists had to establish which of the fine arts was superior to the others.

words what they saw and, furthermore, what they thought and felt when seeing another human moving. Thus, poets use '[verbal] language to try to make an audience imagine a scene' (Webb 2009, p. 3). And when the poet writes about a fictional dance, a dance that they did not witness, their performing text is still the result of a wealth of knowledge about the ability of the human being to express through movement. The moment the writer leaves a vivid testimony of the dancer's movements and/or their own aesthetic experience as a dance spectator, that is when we have dance ekphrasis.

An ekphrastic description can be linked to the ancient concepts of *enargeia* and *phantasia*. Enargeia is the 'possibility of generating visual potency' (Lozano-Renieblas *apud* Agudelo 2001, p. 85) and is related to phantasia, which is understood as 'the ability to reproduce images, as a mental representation capable of being expressed through verbal discourse and as a represented object' (*ibidem*). Hence, enargeia is the level of vividness achieved in an ekphrastic text. Phantasia is related to the images that are present in the writer's mind when writing an ekphrasis, namely, the images that the writer retained mentally after having seen their pre-text. A vivid ekphrasis would be the result of a clear phantasia in the writer's mind, and only then can that phantasia 'appear' in front of the reader/listener's eyes as if they were witnessing what is described in the text.

To have a clear meaning of ekphrasis, it is necessary to consider both ancient and modern meanings of the concept. Thus, I propose that ekphrasis is a discursive practice in which a work of art, an event, or an object of perceptual reality is vividly described by using rhetorical devices that provide 'artisticity' to the produced discourse or text. In this discourse, the confluence of codes belonging to two or more different systems or languages, in this case, languages of dance and poetry, causes the reader/listener to perceive the evoked object as if it were in front of them. Thus, ekphrasis consists of a translation from the world of the visible to the world of the legible. Ekphrasis of dance can be used by poets as a strategy of approaching, and later decoding, the image of the dance or dancer to creatively appropriate them. By fulfilling this function, the ekphrastic text will not only be a representation of its pre-text, but an interpretation and recreation of it.

1.2 Musicality and Rhythm: Essence of Poetry and Dance

Man learned to specify, measure and capture time, a cultural element. Natural phenomena and human actions take place within a time that man conventionalised. Therefore, we have a notion of time. Besides this, humans perceive that ‘There are the rhythms of nature and work, the rhythms of the light signals, the rhythms of music and, in a not too metaphorical sense, the rhythms of the plastic arts. Rhythm is also a general linguistic phenomenon’ (Wellek 1966, p. 193). In this sense, we are not only aware of time, but also of the pace at which events happen and the inner rhythm of natural and cultural objects.

Benedetto Croce asserts that the poet is who listens to the rhythm of the universe and materialises it, makes it fit into the poetic configurations. In this way the poet becomes a transmitter. Conversely, the romantic poet Samuel Coleridge thinks that the universe is a chaos on which the poet imposes an order, a rhythm, which is a ‘balance produced in the spirit by that spontaneous effort that continually struggles to keep the manifestation of the passions under control’ (*apud* Spang 1983, pp. 108-109). Rhythm, however, whichever its origin is, is the articulation of time in segments that are perceptible through the senses. Although the main means to capture the rhythm is the ear, it is not the only one. Kurt Spang affirms that ‘from the auditory sense it is translated to a kinetic sensation and a pleasure if it is consciously perceived. When it is translated into dance, the kinetic feeling is even more clear’ (p. 113). This means that rhythm produces psychological satisfaction but also affects body behaviour in the dancer or in any other listener.

Poetry and music are closely related because the sense of rhythm is present in both art forms. The basic repeating rhythmic unit in music, which inheres in Latin and ancient Greek poetry since it establishes patterns of syllabic lengths (long or short), is the foot.¹² The English word ‘foot’ is a translation of the Latin term *pes*, pl. *pedes*, which in turn is a translation of the ancient Greek ποῦς, pl. πόδες. The ancient Greek prosodists, who invented this terminology, specified that a foot must have both an arsis and a thesis (Pearson 1990, p. 29). That is, a

¹² In some Indo-European languages like Spanish, which do not have long or short syllables but stressed and unstressed syllables, the basic rhythmic structure is the metre. A metre is constituted by a certain number of syllables and is subject to the organisation and distribution of rhythmic units or verses combined in strophes.

place where the foot was raised (arsis) and where it was put down (thesis) in beating time or in marching or dancing. The Greeks recognised three basic types of feet, the iambic (where the ratio of arsis to thesis was 1:2), the dactylic (where it was 2:2) and the paeonic (where it was 3:2) (see Pearson pp. 7; 25).¹³ The link between music and verse, which may be born from humankind's instinct to dance, is expressed by Julia Dabney as follows: 'In the beginning, out of the mists of Time, hand in hand, came those twin sisters of Art, Music and Verse. Man in the exuberant infancy of the race, instinctively danced, and as he danced he sang. The rhythm of his lips gave the rhythm to his foot, and the rhythm of his foot gave the rhythm to his lips, the two interchangeably linked' (1901, p. 1). In poetry, rhythm occurs with the sound media that constitutes language; in music, with sounds, melodies, and timbres. In music it is essential to have a *tempo* to set a rhythm. However, poetry has a rhythm given by the language that comprises it. As Rene Wellek asserts, there are intrinsic elements and sound correlation elements in poetry. The first are the sounds that correspond to each letter of a language and that are basic to the effects of musicality or euphony. The second constitutes the rhythm and the metre: tone, duration of the sounds, accent, repetition. In music, the tone determines the melody. That is why we find a parallel with the intonation of verbal language. However, we must not forget that music-poetry identification is a metaphor, because music has more variety and a better structure for pure sounds (1966, pp. 188-189).

In poetry, unlike everyday speech, a rhythm is perceived because it is an extra-everyday creation. Although all languages and dialects have a rhythm, it is not automatically noticeable since we are used to it. Instead, we are unaccustomed to poetry. Poetic rhythm is configured through the creation of audibly similar phrases. Also, the opposition between stressed and unstressed syllables, tone, timbre, pauses, entanglements, bonds, and rhyme constitute the poetic rhythm. There are poems that transgress the classical rhythms and are distinguished by their break from what the receptor considers rhythmical. In addition, as Giuseppe Tavani proposes, to study the rhythm of a poem it will be necessary to attend to its linguistic-syntactic and semantic elements. The analysis of a sound cannot be separated from the analysis of meaning. The sound itself does not produce an aesthetic effect. Until the moment

¹³ I would like to thank Professor Simon Shaw-Miller for providing these references and enriching this thesis.

that we distinguish the meaning or emotional tone of a musical verse we cannot consider it as an artistic fact (Wellek 1966, p. 188).

Likewise, Ezra Pound asserts that the poet must ‘behave as a musician, a good musician, when dealing with that phase of your art which has exact parallels in music. The same laws govern, and you are bound by no others. Naturally, your rhythmic structure should not destroy the shape of your words, or their natural sound, or their meaning’ (2014, p. 6). Pound affirms that the ‘absolute rhythm’ in poetry corresponds exactly to the emotion or emotional nuance that one wishes to express (p. 9). Here we could refer to the *melopoeia*, ‘poetic genre’ that Pound defines as the one in which words are loaded not only with their simple meaning, but also with some musical property that reorganises that meaning (p. 25). When we read verses such as ‘Repica con los tacones / el tablado zalamera, / como si la mesa fuera / tablado de corazones’, in ‘Bailarina española’, by José Martí (2002, lines 29-32), audible mental images are forged where / re / / pi / / ka / are the corresponding sounds—I even dare to say that with the same $\frac{3}{4}$ compass—that the dancer produces with *zapateado* or steps against the stage. Therefore, we would not only be talking about *melopoeia*, but also about *phanopoeia*, because these verses are projected on the visual imagination.

Alberto Dallal proposes that every human being has an inner rhythm that sometimes needs to be released. This release can result in the performance of a dance. The rhythm can originate in the heartbeat, breathing, fasting periods, or in the time required to perform a specific exercise or movement. Likewise, exterior rhythms, such as lunar cycles and harvest seasons determine the rhythms of man. Again, we refer to creative persons who order a rhythm and transform it into an artistic piece, because ‘the artist must have discovered something: either from life itself or from the means of expression’ (Pound 1970, p. 87). For its part, dance also has rhythm. This rhythm will not always be perceived by sounds or instrumental marks. ‘Whoever is before someone dancing and does not listen to a rhythmic or musical accompaniment can, however, see that rhythm: he will observe it in the movements of the body or bodies that execute the work’ (Dallal 2007, p. 33). Every spectator can recognise that the movements of the dancer segment the time within which the dance is performed. Sometimes, the structure of a dance piece relies entirely on the musical structure and the

inventory of sounds that music offers. The analysis of the dance structure that will lead us to unravel the meaning and form of the piece, affirms Dallal, is comparable to the study of a well-accomplished poem, in which each compositional verse has its own linguistic form, meaning, and significance,¹⁴ but in which these elements depend in turn on the relationships maintained between verses (1992, p. 92).

Dance and poetry are temporary arts. Both develop in a time to which they add meaning through rhythm. But they also have an internal time. In dance and poetic works it is possible to modify time because they create virtual worlds that do not temporarily coincide with the cultural rhythm of reality. For instance, the ballet *El sombrero de tres picos* [*The Three-Cornered Hat*] (premiered in 1919 in Alhambra Theatre, London), with music by the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla and choreographed by the Russian Léonide Massine, based on the homonymous novel by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, tells the convoluted events that took place between a marriage of millers and the Magistrate in a town near Granada. The plot of this story happens in a time frame of two days, namely, all the events included in the story would take place in more than 24 hours if they occurred. However, the ballet develops in only 42 minutes. Namely, the fictional actions narrated in the script, which would take place spanning two days, are represented in 42 minutes. That is why Javier Vilaltella states that dance is ‘a bifrontal place’, because ‘it presents a level of fiction, there is a dimension of “as if”’. But on the other hand, the approach, the body contact that occurs in the dance, is real’ (in Rössner 2000, p. 38). In this fictional plane, time and the characters that act are manipulable but, at the same time, that fictional plane develops in real time.

1.3 Poeticizing Isadora Duncan’s Rhythm

A sense of rhythm existent in poetry and dance can be illustrated with the literary works of two Latin American poets, both familiar with the aesthetics and aims of the dancer Isadora Duncan, who wrote theoretical literary essays drawing comparisons between the rhythms flowing through both artistic expressions.

¹⁴ ‘When we talk about significance, we mean a cultural element, that is, that belongs to the scope of the suprastructural actions of the community’ (Dallal 1992, p.33).

On the 13th August 1903, after attending Duncan's first performance in Paris, Rubén Darío published the article 'Miss Isadora Duncan' in the Illustrated Supplement of *La Nación*. There, Darío pondered on several issues: the 'rarity of Isadora', the beauty of her movements, her innovating art, and puts into play two problems: how to represent movement in writing and how poetry and dance are related in terms of rhythm.

The article begins as follows: 'Sing, oh muse!, To Isadora, the one with bare feet, and her ultramodern dances of pure archaic, and her legs like Diana's, and the ancient music that accompanies the dances, and the twenty-five francs that they made us pay for an armchair in the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre', and continues 'Well, that rhythmic Yankee that does poetry and art with the grace of her body, nymph, priestess and muse herself, is really worthy of enthusiasm, in a primitive and simple impersonator, worthy of the sacred jungles and of the pagan feasts' (Darío 1918b, p. 159). Darío believes that the dancer makes poetry not with words, but with the body. Through poetic description of Duncan's physical actions, he transcribed a discourse of dance signs to one of verbal signs.

Darío knew that Isadora Duncan used art and philosophies of antiquity as the sources for her creations. Therefore, he asserted that, to fully appreciate her dances, one must have notions of ancient art. He perceived her dances as a conjugation of the past, present, and future: 'Isadora surpasses in time the Ancient representation and makes us admire a flowering of that cult' (Darío 1918b, p. 166). Isadora Duncan had also been inspired by painters of the Renaissance and she, in Darío's imagination, would in turn have been a source of inspiration for Sandro Botticelli and Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Darío wrote that what Duncan did was not dance. Dances are those that existed before the advent of the twentieth century, such as the waltz and cakewalk, but

Miss Duncan's [dances] are rather pampered acts, poems of attitudes and gestures, without subjection to anything other than personal rhythm, without rules of their own outside of what Nature indicates [...] Dance, according to her theory, is rhythmized by Pythagorean music, and the rhythm of the spheres, the rhythm of everything that exists, is summed up in her own rhythmic movement, to the musical impulse of her spirit (Darío 1918b, p. 164-165).

This reminds us of ‘Love your Rhythm’, a poem that Darío composed in 1899 and that included in the section ‘The Amphorae of Epicurus’ of *Prosas profanas*:

Love your rhythm and rhythm your actions
in obedience to its law, and your poetry as well;
you are a universe of universes,
and your soul a fountain of song.

(Darío 2017, lines 1-4)

In both texts we appreciate the idea of the existence of two types of rhythm: the universal and the personal. The vital forces of nature dictate a rhythm to the poet, who obeys them to create his own universe. Similarly to the poet, ‘Dance for Miss Isadora Duncan must have no artifice and should be nothing more than a transposition or concentration of the universal rhythm in the human rhythm’ (Darío 1918b, p. 161). The artist must hear what the world expresses so that people and the cosmos reconcile, so that rhythm and thought, melody and idea come together and create music. With this, ‘The rhythm, unites dance, music and poetry like the image unites dance with the visual arts. The analogy of the inner rhythm and that of the universe, substantial in Darío’s poetics, finds in Duncan’s dance its embodiment, making the dancer the poem of form’ (Mogillansky 2012, p. 7). For this reason, Darío had the impulse to capture both the performer and her actions in words, because he found the equal of his rhythm theory in dance.

Conversely, in ‘Los funerales de Isadora Duncan’, an article published in *Mundial*, Lima, on October 28th 1927, César Vallejo reflects upon the rhythm of the Duncan. He concludes:

The barefoot dancer was only living flesh, walking and organic act of the universe. What else but meat can the universal rhythm aspire to? The most dynamic statue of the most perfect frieze is not worth a flow of blood in Eurytmia that irrigates the head of a monster of flesh and blood. And in Isadora Duncan it was the flesh more flesh, the bone more bone, the pain more pain, the joy more joyful, the most dramatic cell (Vallejo 1996, p. 151).

The universal rhythm, for Vallejo, is human. Duncan was neither a figure of the Greek vessels nor muse because she was not a cultural creation, but a natural one. She was flesh and blood who obeyed the impulses of her human spirit and passion. This is not the idea of a cosmic rhythm to which the artist obeys. Rather, rhythm is born from the actions and body of the

individual: 'But the earth retains forever the beat of her bare feet, which rhythm the beat of her heart' (Vallejo 1996, p. 151). Rhythm comes from the inner universe of the artist, who transmits it to the outside.

In this article Vallejo does not describe the movements of any specific Duncan performance, so it is not a verbal representation of a visual event. Nor was it the prelude to some poetic piece whose main subject was dance, as 'Miss Isadora Duncan' was for 'The Dancer with Bare Feet', a poem that I will analyse later. However, this article is relevant because we it can be contrasted with Darío's since both cover a relevant theme for both dance and poetry: rhythm. Furthermore, the conjunction of both theories is consistent with Duncan's theory of rhythm, which stated:

Man has not invented the harmony of music. It is one of the under-lying principles of life. Neither could the harmony of movement be invented: it is essential to draw one's conception of it from Nature herself, and to seek the rhythm of human movement from the rhythm of water in motion, from the blowing of the winds on the world, in all the earth's movements, in the motions of animals, fish, birds, reptiles, and even in primitive man, whose body still moved in harmony with nature' (Duncan 1977, p. 78).

To conclude, dance and poetry arise from the need to communicate more complex ideas than those referring to our most primitive needs. Poets and dance artists select words and movements from the utilitarian systems of human communication and create works whose aim is to communicate something that could not be expressed in a better way.

II. THE CHOSEN DANCER: ISADORA DUNCAN IN POETRY

The twentieth century is known as a period of change, a time in which many people felt free to express their thoughts and feelings and to conjugate or, failing that, to debate all knowledge acquired in previous centuries. This century witnessed the achievements of women who set their presence in the political, social, and economical fields since they recognised themselves as active subjects necessary for the sustainment of society (Hernández 2007, p. 131). In a context in which daily habits changed because new consumption habits were mutating and due to technology advances, a new physical culture was adopted. People were aware that the practise of physical activities helped to improve health and to make the most of the human body potential. One of the main activities that attracted women's attention was dance since it involved not only exercise but graceful movements. Moreover, dance was a space open to social and expressive explorations. As Ramsey Burt and Michael Huxley note:

As a physical activity, it constituted a decisive break with nineteenth- century gender ideologies that imposed particularly restrictive ideas about women's bodies [...] By the 1920s, dancing had become a recognised activity for the 'new woman', one that manifested itself at various levels: both in social dancing and as professional performance, as a recreational activity, and as a valued component in progressive education' (Burt and Huxley, 2020, p. 35).

Hence, dance practice and famous dancers were special and favourable examples for this wave of female emancipation.

2.1 Isadora Duncan's Dance Style

Isadora Duncan was a prominent figure from the twentieth century not only for being a revolutionary woman who proclaimed and practised modern ideas in life and art. She developed a process of self-searching and self-discovery of the possibilities surrounding a woman's body and mind apart from those constrained abilities that were previously vested by male choreographers. Moreover, looking always towards the future of dance art, she founded a dance institution with new principles that kept developing even after her death.

Isadora and her three older siblings, Elizabeth (1871), Agustin (1873) and Raymond (1874), grew up in a highly artistic environment. They were raised by their mother, Dora Duncan, a musician who spent long periods of time playing the piano and reading poetry to the children who, on their part, accompanied the musical and poetic pieces with lyrical dances and dramatic interpretations. In 1884, the family founded a dance school in the studio in which they were living in Oakland, and the main teacher was Elizabeth. Promptly after, Raymond and Isadora started teaching too, and she taught the youngest pupils to dance to the rhythm of composers



Figure 1. Isadora Duncan Dancing by the Sea, 1915. The New York Library Digital Collections.

such as Mozart and Schubert. Isadora also enjoyed dancing on the beach, listening to the rhythm of the ocean, and mimicking the wave movements.

Duncan lacked a solid dance technique. Dubia Hernández and Fernando Johns state that Isadora did not take professional ballet lessons since ballet technique was passing through a decadent period (2007, p. 231). However, I believe that Duncan did not have professional ballet training because of two main factors: her precarious childhood and youth, and her lack of interest in the practice of an activity that she found ugly and unnatural to the mind and body. In her autobiography *My Life* (1927), she states that she only took three ballet lessons when she was a child, but quit and preferred to start exploring a bigger range of movements.

Due to their tough financial situation, the Duncans moved to the East of the United States in 1896. By then, Isadora had joined Agustin Daly's theatre company to perform *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream and *The Geisha* in a tour across New York City and Europe. However, Duncan felt unhappy in the company not only because they started facing financial difficulties, but because of her misunderstandings with the director, who rejected her ideas. Nevertheless, thanks to her work at the company, Isadora began to gain recognition within the American high society from New York. As a source of money, Elizabeth and Isadora accepted invitations to perform and lecture about their dance philosophy during afternoon meetings at the Carnegie Lyceum and Waldorf Astoria, hosted by Mabel Dodge and Nicholas Beach (*New York Times*, February 16, 1898; Simonson 1998, p. 82). During these meetings Duncan demonstrated her social abilities, which she developed over the course of her life and that were key for her to become a prominent figure within the artistic and cultural circles in both America and Europe.

By the end of the century, willing to explore artistic possibilities and improve their finances, the Duncans moved to England. This was the beginning of Isadora's recognition as a relevant artist, especially in Germany, Russia, and France. Her technique and style, based on ancient Greek models, was a striking feature for her audiences and critics. Finally, her intentions to interpret the purity and beauty of Hellenic art were starting to be understood and to receive positive reception.

Nonetheless, there was no lack of censorship of both, her artistic principles, and her personal life. Firstly, because the flow of her movements was considered a 'gross violation of the proprieties of life' (*New York Times*, November 2, 1909) by conservative critics. Her defence of nudity in dance was also considered openly sexual (Anderson 2008, pp. 356-357) and was constantly banned.¹⁵ Besides this, her staging of some musical pieces with political ideas, such as her interpretations of *La Marseillaise* in New York, France, and Argentina in 1916 and 1917, caused tensions 'between traditional gender ideologies, nationalistic wartime politics and progressive aspirations' (Burt and Huxley 2020, p. 215). Concerning her

¹⁵ For instance, Berlin Police prohibited Isadora Duncan to dance in public (*New York Times*, January 5, 1906) and her dance school in Berlin was banned because of the police regulations on nude art. She had to move her school to Darmstadt, with the Grand Duke as patron (*New York Times*, November 8, 1908).

personal life, her public statements, her aversion to marriage, and her multiple romantic relationships, were behaviours divergent to the moral code of those times.

In contrast, these liberal attitudes were applauded by others, especially women and creative people who were witnessing a necessary wave of changes in a world craving the influence of females in fields other than family. As Mary Simonson notices, the target American readers of Duncan's performance reviews; the stories about her romantic life; her thoughts about marriage, and the articles about her dance academies, were women (1998, p. 83). Hence, American press fostered an image of Duncan as a figure for liberty and modernity because she was creating a dance aligned to the times she was living: 'Just when many Americans sought moral reform, new modes of spirituality, stronger connections with nature, a national selfhood, and a means of self-expression, Duncan attempted to create a style of dance that simultaneously addressed these wants and depicted the search for identity, meaning, and beauty' (p. 81). Isadora was yearning for a dance that allowed humans to be independent from archaic formalisms at a time they should aim for a body-mind-spirit interdependence:

For three hours I sat tense with bewilderment, watching the amazing feats of Pavlowa. She seemed to be made of steel and elastic [...] The whole tendency of this training seems to be to separate the gymnastic movements of the body completely from the mind. The mind, on the contrary, can only suffer in aloofness from this rigorous muscular discipline. This is just the opposite from all the theories on which I founded my school, by which the body becomes transparent and is a medium for the mind and spirit' (Duncan 1968, p. 177).

This mind-body separation did not mean beauty according to Duncan's ideas. She believed that movement should not be invented but discovered, and that is how one is able to know energetic and free movements full of meaning and expression. Thus, movement must come from the very inside of the dancer to work as an emotional experience and it should not be systematic.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Duncan did not systemise any dance technique like Martha Graham, José Limón, or Merce Cunningham did (see subchapter 2.2), but she did renew the art of dance by proposing a freer dancing that reflected the rhythm and movements

of the nature and that were capable of manifesting all kind of emotions.¹⁶ As Alberto Dallal states, even when Duncan strove for a neoclassical dance but did not establish a dance technique, our debt to her is that she knew that dance could not remain outside the great social and cultural transformations that were taking place around the world and so she pointed to the need to attract to the stage the advances achieved in technology, music, and visual arts (2007, p. 61).

Isadora taught her pupils to stimulate their creativity, rediscover the principles of beauty in motion, and dance and gesture according to the musical nuances of classical composers. Isadora, more than aiming to create a new technique, wanted to establish a dance and movement philosophy: 'My intention is to found a school, to build a theatre where a hundred little girls shall be trained in my art, which they, in their turn, will make better. I shall not force them to study certain definite movements; I shall help them to develop those movements which are natural to them' (Duncan *apud* Simonson 1998, p. 91). Hence, as every dancer would follow their own emotions and expressive needs, the result would be dances composed by unique movements based on each dancer's interpretations of their surrounding world. The flow of the dancer's movement had to be continuous, namely, the end of a movement had to be the start of the next one. Thus, 'the channel from the interior to exterior is circulatory because each gesture provides the impetus for the next internal sensation' (Franko *apud* Anderson 2008, p. 359). This principle was a shift from the isolated ballet steps and movements to a fluid dance that obeyed 'the movement of the earth, making, in that way,

¹⁶ These two main principles of Isadora Duncan's art may have their origin in Nietzsche's ideas of what dance is. Dancing, for Nietzsche, is a form of human expression that uses the body as a whole and not only parts of it like language does. Hence, dancing does not represent any body constraints and so it can reflect all the creative potential of the dancer. The dancing body makes kinetic images, and so dancing is a symbolic activity that expresses the essence of nature when it allows people to feel their bodies full of an energy that is more powerful than themselves: 'In song and in dance man exhibits himself as a member of a higher community, he has forgotten how to walk and speak, and is on the point of taking a dancing flight into the air. His gestures bespeak enchantment. Even as the animals now talk, and as the earth yields milk and honey, so also something supernatural sounds forth from him: he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted and elated even as the gods whom he saw walking about in his dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of all nature here reveals itself in the tremors of drunkenness to the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity' (Nietzsche 2019, p. 27). This engagement of the body is what allows dancing both 'to establish a visceral connection between chorus and audience and communicate across that identification a sense of Dionysian rapture' (LaMothe 2006, p. 27) because dance (the dance of the chorus) acts like a bridge between the dramatic text and the spectator, who will see themselves as if they were part of the power of creation and destruction that the drama suggests.

each movement a microcosmos of the cosmos' (Simonson 1998, p. 90). The dancers who adopt her principles will contribute to the evolution of dance, while Duncan was the seed for change.

The fact that Isadora got rid of her ballet tights and shoes and wore Greek-style tunics and loose hair, not only meant a disruption with ballet rules but worked as a symbol of women's liberation from the strict moral norms that were considered unbreakable just a few decades before. Although Duncan was keen to create a dance that was appropriate for 'long-legged' American children who were going to make 'the dance of the America of the future',¹⁷ —a highly debatable declaration—, I agree with Elizabeth Francis who states that Duncan promoted a universal and timeless image of women through the liberation of the constraints of ballet costumes: 'the tunic let the female body be perceived as a unified whole. Her costume also became an emblem of woman's emancipation, a radical performance of a woman's body freed from the binding and stifling layers of culture [...] Duncan sought to reveal an essential body beneath the surface of culture and to mould culture to fit that body' (1994, p. 26). By revealing the female body through transparent fabrics, Duncan was not appealing to an erotisation of it, but her objective was to show a natural and powerful woman whose legs were going to be more attractive than her breast. This characterless body had to work as a mirror of her female audience but, at the same time, had to establish 'a type of distance between herself and the audience that undercut an eroticized appropriation of her performance' (Koritz *apud* Anderson 2008, p. 357). The way Duncan found to achieve the latter and set herself free from the constraints of modern civilisation was by returning not to the primitive era, but to the civilised ancient Greek age.

The problems of a century ago do not seem far from those we currently face: exclusivist policies, social fragmentation, borders, misrepresented technology, alienation, human mechanisation, gender repression. In this context, Duncan opted for a 'Dance of the Future',

¹⁷ Isadora Duncan, in her autobiography, states that neither jazz music nor Charleston dance express America because, for her eyes, those rhythms and movements were primitive savage. Moreover, she writes: 'The real American type can never be a ballet dancer. The legs are too long, the body too supple, and the spirit too free for this school of affected grace and toe-walking. It is notorious that all great ballet dancers have been very short women with small frames' (1968, p. 359).



Figure 2. Photo lithograph of Isadora Duncan by Edward Gordon Craig, 1905. Victoria and Albert Museum. Department of Theatre and Performance. Isadora Duncan Archives.

as she would define it in her 1903 manifesto, in which woman would dance with a total body-mind and civilisation-spirit connection. In this dance, females would no longer have the need to inhibit and fragment their dance but would dance that which their interior needed to expose through concatenated movement. Their body would be the means of expression of the impulse of the movement born from the solar plexus since the motor of the latter should no longer come from an external male dictation.¹⁸

Isadora Duncan's decision to not conceal her body during her dances, her natural and childish movements,

her manifesto on a spirit-body link in dance, and her novel-like life, which ended in a car accident,¹⁹ fed the imagination and aesthetics of several modernist artists. Sculptors, like Auguste Rodin; costume designers like Mariano Fortuny in his Greek-style dresses; theatre directors like Edward Gordon Craig in his photo lithographs, and writers like Gertrude Stein and her 'Orta, or One Dancing', took Duncan as a starting point for their works. In this context, I consider that the return to the Classics, was Isadora Duncan's response to

¹⁸ This argument is relevant when we bear in mind that, in western academic dance history, women as choreographers, creators, and artistic company directors did not have a striking presence before the coming of Isadora Duncan. All the recognised female names, such as Martha Graham, Katherine Dunham, Mary Wigman, Pina Bausch and Alicia Alonso, to mention some, belong to the twentieth century and all of them, inevitably, took great influence from Duncan's foundations.

¹⁹ Isadora Duncan's death will be further discussed in the subchapter 3.3.

modernity to disrupt bias imposed on dancers and choreographers' creativity during the nineteenth century.

2.2 The Parallelism between Modern Dance and Modern Poetry

Modernism, which is conventionally framed between the end of the nineteenth century to the decade of 1940, is a period that is striking for an intrinsic closeness between dance and literature. This alignment was possible since writers felt attracted to primitive and archetypal themes of dance and to its formal properties (Ponce 2010, p. 32). Writers paid attention to dance's new free forms. They felt attracted by the impregnation of meaning and emotion in every step and gesture; by the chorographical designs on stage; by the use of technologies and references to other arts on stage, and by the importance given to the music. Besides these features, there was an extended goal among many artists: to look to the classical Greek past to reform art of the future. This look at the past would not mean a setback, as some critics would argue.²⁰ On the contrary, they were sure that a return to ancient principles would mean a liberation from the repressions of modern civilisation.

The interest in ancient Greek and Roman art and culture during the twentieth century was in part fostered by the new research on Greek culture and Heinrich Schliemann's archaeological discoveries (Troy and Mycenae's ruins), in the previous century. A renaissance took place thanks to artists' interest in transforming and revive Greek methods, values, and principles which ancient art works were based on. The acquisition of knowledge about Greco-Roman culture had also a socio-economical background. Mary Simonson declares:

Ancient Greek literature, language, and art had long been considered central to the education of elite male Americans; as the Barnard Greek Games suggests, these disciplines were included in the curriculum at newly established women's colleges and coeducational institutions as well [...] Hellenist fascination was not limited to education institutions, though. Many elite Americans collected classical art and objects, and as reproductions of such items became available, the middle class eagerly purchased them for their homes (Simonson 1998, pp. 48-49).

²⁰ For instance, the article 'Dancing and the Dancers' published in the *New York Times* on March 8, 1909, is a harsh criticism of Isadora Duncan and Maud Allan. The author appeals that both dancers have lost their old days charm and that their attempt to recall the ancient Greek dances is pointless in places like London and New York. The journalist argues that Duncan and Allan should focus on giving back the dances of society their graces back instead.

In this context, it is not surprising that writers self-educated in Greek culture to figure among the intellectual elite. And performing artist, for their side, found in ancient Greek imaginarium 'an escape from and alternative to the urban, industrialized, and materialist modern world' (Simonson 1998, p. 49). Some dance creators used Greek themes and motifs in their works, and they drew from Greek philosophical principles to reflect upon the present status and future development of dance.

Friedrich Nietzsche's approach to classical drama in *The Birth of Tragedy in the Spirit of Music* (1872), as well as his conception of dance (see footnote 16) were prominent references for modernist writers such as W. B. Yeats, whose dramas reflect an aesthetic that moves between the Mallarméan symbolist form and the Nietzschean dissonance, and dancers and choreographers including Isadora Duncan, who encompassed with Nietzsche's notion of bodily being; Martha Graham, who found in Nietzsche's texts a perspective of dance art as an instrument to revalue Christian values, and George Balanchine, with his *Apollo musagète* and *Apollo*, two versions of the same staging that reflect a struggle between the Nietzschean creative modes. These artists, over the years, configured, re-configured, and experimented with their own dance aesthetics negotiating between Nietzsche's metaphors of Apollinian energy (measure, creation, individuality, calm, clarity) and Dionysian mode (agonistic, unconsciousness, destruction, rapture, ecstasis). Nietzsche resolves that both energies have to be present in every artwork, however, the Apollinian may dominate in visual arts while the Dionysian will reign in music and dance: 'Beholding [*das Schauen*], the beautiful or seemly [*das Schöne*], what shines or seems [*Schein*]: these bound the realm of Apollonian art: it is the transfigured world of the eye that creates artistically, behind closed eyelids, in the dream' (Nietzsche 2013, p. 40) and 'Music and tragic myth are equally the expression of the Dionysian capacity of a people, and are inseparable from each other. Both originate in an ultra-Apollonian sphere of art; both transfigure a region in the delightful accords of which all dissonance, just like the terrible picture of the world, dies charmingly away' (2006, p. 186).

Isadora Duncan found in Nietzsche's philosophy an understanding of what the art of dance is capable of expressing and transforming. For her, dance can offer an alternative morality to

all those moral codes imposed by Christianity. Therefore, Duncan established her dance principles in a reaffirmation of life and of the connection of the human being, especially women, with their body, which was a value that Christian religion failed to offer. Hence, ‘Duncan embraced dance, the art whose medium is bodily movement, as providing a unique opportunity for humans to come to know their human bodies as source and site for creating values, including values of beauty and holiness. Dancing, she believed, could provide a model for what religion should be—an “expression of life”’ (LaMothe 2006, p. 108). Furthermore, both Nietzsche, via his philosophical texts, and Duncan, via dance, saw in ancient Greek culture an ideal for the revaluation of religion. This renewal of Christianity, for Duncan, was possible through dance because Greek dancers seem to be free women, as goddesses, with their movements and loose tunics.

Isadora Duncan, during her explorations of human figures in Greek pottery and sculptures, saw a raw matter that would work to found the philosophies of a dance in which the link between civilisation, spirituality, and nature would be indissoluble. Greeks were, for her, the example of the consciousness that a dancer must have about their senses and gestures and about the concepts of harmony, beauty, purity, and totality, which were paramount in Greek civilisation, but which had been lost in the modern social dynamic. Isadora thought that ancient Greeks, ‘in all their painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, dance, and tragedy evolved their movements from the movement of nature [...] This is why the art of the Greeks is not a national or characteristic art but has been and will be the art of all humanity for all time’ (Duncan 1977, p. 58).

It is worth noting that Duncan did not try to copy nor recreate Greek dances, stating ‘To return to the dances of the Greeks would be as impossible as it is unnecessary. We are not Greeks and therefore cannot dance Greek dances’ (1977, p. 62). What she tried to do was to revive them. Elizabeth Kendall notes that Duncan evolved the style of her dancing when she moved to London, transforming it into a more idiosyncratic one: ‘Duncan’s versions [of Greek gestures] were broader. They were no longer gestures but motions because they led into other motions. Their purpose was not to transmit a mimed message but to show an action’

(*apud* Burt and Huxley 2020, pp. 100-101). And this was precisely Duncan's aim, to make fluid and timeless actions that reflected the freedom and uniqueness of her soul and body. Rubén Darío, who always admired the perfection of classical metrical lines and stanzas and who worked on neoclassical subjects in his prose and poetry, in his poem 'The Dancer with Bare Feet' (1907), writes:

She goes, in rhythmic and feline pace
to sweet, agile, or rude advances,
with something of an animal and of divinity
the dancer with bare feet.

(Darío 1918a, lines 1-4)

Darío highlights the wildness of Duncan's steps but points out that her movements are always rhythmical. Her dancing is animalistic, but also divine. These pairs of concepts, which could prove oxymoronic, worked harmoniously in this new generation of artists. In the last verse of this strophe, Darío mentions Duncan's bare feet, which, for him, were her most aesthetic body part. In his article 'Miss Isadora Duncan' he constantly emphasises the naked feet of the dancer, stating that they are the most artistic and perfect element of her body. Thus, this dancer was for Darío an embodied example of a liberation from the traditional canons.



Figure 3. 'Isadora Duncan at the Parthenon'. Photograph by Edward Steichen, ca. 1920. New York Public Library, Performing Arts in America 1875-1923 Digital Collection.

LE MAÎTRE
 hors d'anciens calculs
 où la manœuvre avec l'âge oubliée
 surgi
 inférant
 jadis il empoignait la barre
 de cette conflagration
 à ses pieds
 de l'horizon unanime
 que se prépare
 s'agite et mêle
 au poing qui l'étreindrait
 comme on menace un destin et les vents
 le nombre unique qui ne peut pas en être un autre
 esprit
 pour le lancer
 dans la tempête
 en reployer l'apex division et passer fier
 hésite
 tout chenu
 cadavre par le bras écarté du secret qu'il détient
 plutôt
 que de jouer en maniaque la partie
 au nom des flots
 un envahit le chef
 coule en barbe sournise
 naufrage cela direct l'homme
 sans nef
 n'importe
 où vaine

Figure 4. Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Le Maître', included in *Un Coup de Dés Jamais Quand Bien Meme Lancé Dans des Circonstances Eternelles*, 1894, a text in which the author experimented with spatial disruptions of the text positions and typography to create a special visual aspect and rhythm.

The notion of the Greek chorus was also an important point in Duncan's dance. Her concept of chorus had a great influence of Nietzsche's notion of tragic chorus as the entity that, by singing and dancing, transforms and affects the audience who reflect themselves in what the chorus represents gaining, in that way, consciousness of themselves.

Nietzsche contends that the chorus' dancing is key to complete a magical transformation upon the audience since they intrinsically identify with the anonymous members of the chorus. In a context of cultural and social

fragmentation, Duncan assured that dance should address Greek choral principles about community, unity, and cohesion. She, as an individual, would be a faceless and nameless woman who would represent the community through an impersonalisation of herself. With Duncan, in her attempt to 'contain crowds' (Francis 1994, p. 31), would use her body and movements to represent a chorus of universal emotions, thoughts and expressive needs that, delivering both the Apollonian and the Dionysian messages, were useful to help her audience

to gain consciousness of themselves as being that take part in the creation of the universe's rhythms (Lamothe 2006, p. 123). Considering these principles, dance went through a revolutionary process. Its new techniques, schools, and styles resulted in the creation of a new dance language that was attractive for writers who, in parallel, were experimenting with new poetic forms. A dialogue between both arts was established thanks to the literary and choreographic explorations of body, gender, race, identity, and the relationships between corporeal, temporal, and spatial phenomena (Jones 2013, p. 5). Poets and dancers were exploring the ways in which humans can express any

type of emotion and feeling and the way they interact with their social environment. Artists took advantage of scientific and technological advances but were also interested in showing the extreme ways humans can act.

For instance, Loïe Fuller (Chicago, 1862-Paris, 1928) used a wide range of visual effects on American and European stages. Her famous dances, such as *The Serpentine* and *The Butterfly*, included movements in which costume and stage lights were essential to create the desired effects. On his behalf, Mallarmé considered that Fuller was a metaphorical figure who suggests rather than imposing a meaning. For instance, for her *Serpentine Dance* she did

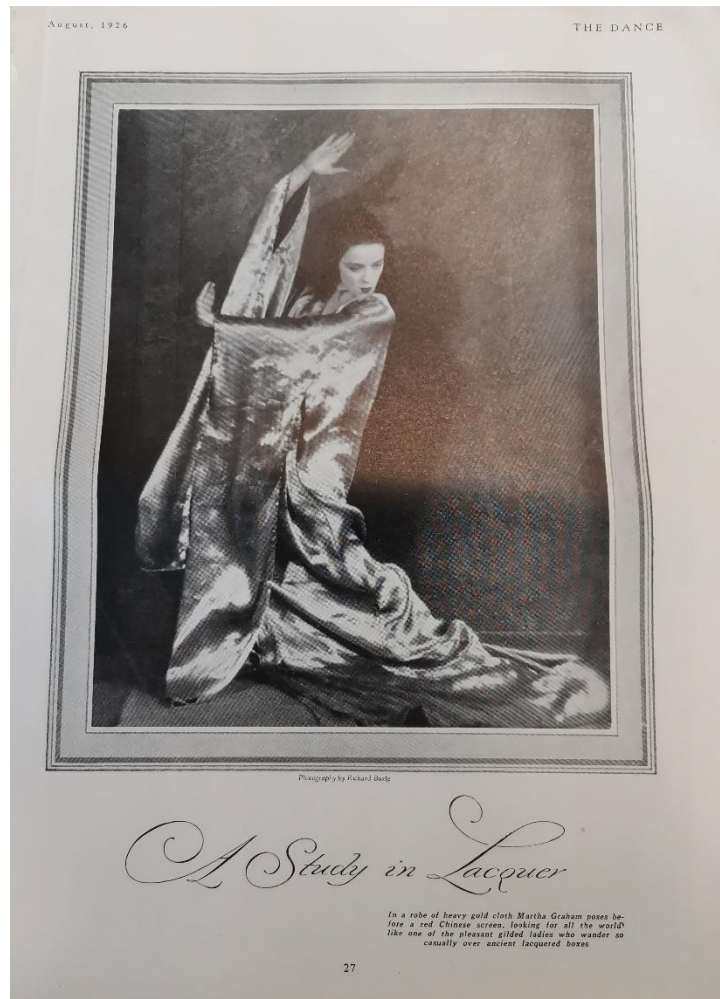


Figure 5. 'A Study in Lacquer'. Photograph by Richard Burke. Taken from the magazine *The Dance*, August 1926. The note underneath the photograph is: 'In a robe of heavy gold cloth Martha Graham poses before a red Chinese screen, looking for all the world like one of the pleasant gilded ladies who wander so casually over ancient lacquered boxes.'

not literary imitate the movements of a snake but only suggested them through her swirling movements and the effects that the lighting and her undulating costume veils created on stage. In this way, Fuller made the most of the new knowledge around sciences like physics and the research on electricity and became a signifying dancer who was able to bodily write on stage but who also became a functional figure for the poet who could appropriate her dancing body and use it as a code for the making of poetry (Jones 2013, p. 20-21). Proof of this is the fact the Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* was inspired by Fuller's swirling dance. The spatial disruptions in the lines of poems suggest the movements of the dancer on stage, namely, Fuller's choreography equalled to form in Mallarmé's poetry.

Ruth St. Dennis (Newark, 1877-Los Angeles, 1968) took oriental dances as a model and adapted them to the American style. Ruth, next to her partner Ted Shaw (Kansas City, 1891-1972) founded the Denishaw school in 1915 in Los Angeles. Three of the most noticeable people who attended include Doris Humphrey (Chicago, 1895-1958), Charles Weidman (Lincoln, 1901-New York City-1975) and Martha Graham (Pittsburgh, 1894-New York City 1991). They were all aware of the need to create a whole new technique, with different procedures and principles, to train a new generation of dancers. Martha Graham was even inspired by Mallarmé's poem *Hérodiade*. In 1944 she created a homonymous choreography in which she embodied the poem's linguistic structures. Undoubtedly, the Graham technique is still an obligatory subject in modern and classical dance schools and companies, alongside the Limón technique, which was created by José Limón (Culiacán, 1908-1972), whose principle was to show both the beautiful and tragic features of the human condition, and along with Cunningham technique, by Merce Cunningham (Washington, 1919-New York City, 2009), whose main principles are spatial awareness, which means that any spot in the space can be the dancer's front and there can be many changes of direction within the same musical phrase; the development of body strength and flexibility in order to expand the movement's possibilities, especially those of the torso and legs; and rhythmic precision, where dancers can either follow a given tempo or can move independently from the music that is playing in the same space and time. Meanwhile, Rudolf Laban (Pozsony, 1879-Weybridge, 1958) dedicated much of his work to the understanding of body vocabulary in Germany. He made a notation for dance, known as labanotation, whose aim is to capture a dance step or movement in signs, and so, have a written record of scenic arts.

Modern dancers and choreographers aimed to expand the body's expressive possibilities, possibilities that were not part of the rigid classical technique. Moreover, the goal of bringing together dance, drama, visual and literary arts, and technology, caused choreographers and producers to work next to creators whose area of expertise was not dance, calling the attention of eclectic audiences and practitioners. They all met new movements, energies, attitudes, and intentions and made them part of the principles and rules of this fresh dance.

III. WHAT DID POETS SEE IN ISADORA DUNCAN?

Isadora Duncan's audience was formed in part by other artists who were syntonised with her initiative of submitting art to a renaissance. One of her spectators was Rubén Darío, who worked on a reconfiguration of poetry and literature in Spanish language, starting the first literary movement, born in Latin America, which projected its influx to Spain: Latin American Modernism or Modernismo.

Modernismo, in the Spanish-speaking Latin American literature context, meant a renewal in the language and metrics of poetry. This Modernismo differs chronologically to European and American Modernism, which I previously dated between the end of the nineteenth century to the 1940s. Latin American Modernismo, as a movement that, conventionally, started in 1888, with the publication of Darío's *Azul*, and that ended in the 1910s, responded to the challenges and crises that came with modern life in the fields of arts, sciences, politics, social hierarchies, and belief systems. This movement was a reaction to the stagnation of Spanish literature since the end of the Golden Age in the eighteenth century and to the subjugation of American artistic forms under the colonial impositions of Europe. It was also a reaction to naturalist literature of Émile Zola and literary accounts of materialistic lifestyle and practices of bourgeois class. Modernist writers were influenced by French Symbolists and Parnassians, taking them as model in the metrics and in the use of rhetorical resources in their texts. With an aesthetics that was a 'synthesis of tradition and rupture' (Gomes 2002, p. 67), modernist writers sought a balance between the use of refined language and the inclusion of imagination; linguistic experimentation and the rescue of ancient poetic forms; the exposure of their own culture and individuality, and the exploration of foreign cultures.

During Modernismo, many literary essays were written with the aim to 'reflect upon art, its limits, its mission, its intricacies; and upon the concept of beauty as a way to attain knowledge and transcendence' (Gomes 2002, p. x). The lack of a manifesto written by the modernists increases the importance of these essays as artists stated in them their own ideas and reflected upon their contemporaries, just as Darío and César Vallejo did in their articles about Duncan, which we explored in the first chapter. In this context, attracted to Duncan's beauty as a

dancer and thinker, Darío chose her as his contemplation subject for both, the article ‘Miss Isadora Duncan’, and the poem ‘The Dancer with Bare Feet’.

3.1 Natural and Puerile Dancing

The recognition of Isadora Duncan as a dancer whose movements and dance philosophy had as background natural law is evident in four of the poems that constitute my corpus of work. The present section analyses the excerpts of the poems in which Duncan’s natural and childish dancing is ekphrastically described and compares the poets’ conception of the figure of Duncan with the theoretical fundaments that she wrote about her natural dance.

The first example is ‘The Dancer with Bare Feet’. This poem was first published in *El canto errante* in 1907. Researchers including Elia Torrecilla and Miguel Molina (2019, p. 20), and Maria Pilar Queralt (2005, pp. 13-14) propose that this poem was dedicated not to Isadora Duncan but to Tórtola Valencia, a Spanish dancer who followed some of Duncan’s dance principles and who also gained recognition across Europe and the Americas. However, there are some facts that do not support this hypothesis. It is true that Valencia performed a dance piece with a similar title, ‘La gitana de los pies desnudos’ [‘The barefoot Gypsy’]. Although performances in private residencies such as salons and mansions were common during these times and we cannot discard that Tórtola performed in an exclusive social event, the first time that she danced on a stage for a wide audience was in 1908 (Clayton 2012, p. 29). It can also be argued that the pre-text for this poem was not a particular dancer but the whole former modern dance generation, including Ruth St. Dennis and Maud Allan, who were creating a hybrid and eclectic dance (Clayton 2012, p. 30). Nonetheless, the *incipit* of Darío’s ‘Miss Isadora Duncan’ is ‘Sing, oh muse!, To Isadora, the one with bare feet’ (1918b, p. 149). In this *invocatio museae*, Darío features Duncan straightway as the barefoot dancer, and it would not be surprising that only four years after he saw her performing, he wrote a poem inspired by her.

‘The Dancer with Bare Feet’ is a poem composed of four quatrains of hendecasyllabic verses with consonant rhyme in ABAB. This is a Modernismo sonnet whose structure is similar to that of a classical Hispanic sonnet. The classical Hispanic sonnet is composed by two

quatrains and two tercets with a rhyme in ABBA ABBA CDC DCD, while the modernismo sonnet has a consistent rhyme all along its quartets. Even with this variation in the number of verses, the last two quatrains are the outcome of the whole poem, as in classical sonnets.

The last verse of the first, second and fourth strophes repeat the title of Darío's poem. This repetition emphasises the novel characteristic of the dancer performing with naked feet and showing the natural beauty and power of this body part. This verse may also imply an anagrammatic game. As Angel Herrero proposes, this verse is an example that itself contains the name of Isadora Duncan in a diagrammatic iconicity in which some of its letters and syllables, reorganised, reveal the identity of the referent subject:

la bailar**ina** de los **pies** desnudos

is

a

do

ra

[c]an

dun

(Herrero 1998, p. 211)

Isadora's barefoot feature was also a striking characteristic that Max Eastman (New York City, 1883-Bridgetown, 1969) pointed out in 'Isadora Duncan', a sonnet published in *Colors of Life. Poems and songs and sonnets* in 1918:

Who is this naked-footed lovely girl
Of summer meadows dancing on the grass?.
So young and tenderly her footsteps pass,
So dreamy-limbed and lightly wild and warm—
The bugles murmur and the banners furl,
And they are lost and vanished like a storm!
(Eastman 1918, lines 9-14)

The poetic 'I' characterises Duncan as a young girl moving puerile and wildly in a virtual scenario that sounds like a *locus amoenus*²¹ since it is a natural open space where soft music is playing from an unknown source.

²¹ A literary topos that refers to a 'pleasant place'. For instance, in European medieval literature, a standardised *locus amoenus* depicts peaceful fields that are almost as beautiful as the Garden of Eden. This type of places also fosters amorous encounters. The description of the fields defines an interaction or a return of people to

METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE
TO-MORROW (Sunday) EVG. AT 8:15.
Naval Night
GRAND CONCERT
 (Direction Mr. DANIEL MAYER)
 In aid of the funds of Woman's Auxiliary Committee for Naval Recruiting.
 In co-operation with U. S. Navy.
 Artists who have kindly given their services:
 Louise Homer, Florence Easton, Clarence Whitehill, Amy Castle, Leone Zinovieff, Maurice Dambois, Julia Marlowe, Marcia Van Dresser, Florence Macbeth, Francis MacLennan, Auguste Boulliez, Mischa Levitski, Clifton Crawford, E. H. Sothern.
 Orchestra of 75, Pierre Monteux, Cond.
 New Recruiting Song by Irving Berlin.
 Marine Band of Navy Yard.
SAILORS OF U. S. NAVY IN DRILL.
 Boxes \$50 & \$30. Tickets 75 cts. to \$3
 at Box Office, Metropolitan Opera House.

Metropolitan Opera House
Positively TO-DAY at 2:30
Last Appearance
Isadora Duncan
AND HER PUPILS.
 Allegretto Symphony en re mine; Morceau Symphonique, "Redemption," Cesar Franck; Ave Maria, Schubert; "Pathetique" Symphony, Tchaikowsky; Marche Slave, etc.
 Orchestra of 85, Oscar Spirescu, Cond.
 Tickets 50 cts. to \$2.50, at Box Office,
 Management R. J. Johnston.

Figure 6. Advertisement of Isadora Duncan's performance, *The New York Times*; April 28, 1917.

This poem was also included in the chapter 'Heroism Plus Heroics: Difficulties in Worshipping Isadora Duncan' in Max Eastman's book *Heroes I have known: twelve who lived great lives* (1942). In this article, Eastman states that he met Duncan a few times in Paris and in the United States. He watched her dancing at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1917, in a performance with the six dancers that took the surname Duncan for being Isadora's first disciples: Anna, Erica, Irma, Lisa, Margot, and Maria Theresa, 'The Isadorables'. This presentation may refer to one of the performances given in March and April in 1917 at the Metropolitan Opera House, in which they danced to music by Schubert, Chopin, Brahms, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky with live orchestra.

Eastman admired Isadora because of her powers of motion and expression, including her dance skills, her talent as a speechmaker, and her peculiar and strong personality. He declared:

She was one of the great people of the earth, incomparably greater than Duse and Sarah Bernhardt, with whose names hers is so often linked. She was not only a supreme artist as they were, endowed by nature with intense power and the intense will to restrain it; she was also a creative and a moral force. She used her power, not only to entertain and enlarge the world, but to move it. And she did move it. She created, or re-created perhaps—it is hard to tell—a new art, the art of natural dancing (Eastman 1942, p. 71).

Eastman sent the poem 'Isadora Duncan' to the dancer after having seen her performing: 'I sent my sonnet to her after one of her performances at Carnegie Hall—verily in the mood of

nature and highlights the advantages of country life over urban life. The same critique to city life was a topic in the context of a highly industrialised and technological twentieth-century world.

one who lays a fervently created tribute on the altar of a god' (Eastman 1942, p. 78). The first verses of the poem are the following:

You bring the fire and terror of the wars
Of infidels in thunder-running hordes,
With spears like sun-rays, shields, and wheeling
swords
Flame shape, death shape and shaped like scimi-
tars,
With crimson eagles and blue pennantry,
And teeth and armor flashing, and white eyes
Of battle horses, and the silver cries
Of trumpets unto storm and victory!
(Eastman, 1918, lines 1-8)

Eastman wrote these verses in an attempt to 'express her versatility and complete command of the reality existing for the audience who watched her dance' (Eastman 1942, p. 78). This poem opens with a strident war scene, with the images of objects such as swords and shields—the image of shields as part of Isadora Duncan's body also appears in Darío's poem—and closes with a bucolic-like picture of Duncan dancing in the meadows.

Considering that the twentieth century witnessed times in which artists shared compositional methods and in which communication and networks were being built between European and American intellectuals, times when there was an open access to information of what was happening to on the other side of the Atlantic, we may ask ourselves, what drew these poets to a specific artist?

Both, Darío and Eastman, demonstrated admiration and good knowledge of Duncan's art. Both were direct spectators of her performances, but, at the same time, they also appreciated the work that the dancer did beyond the stage, namely the speeches and writings that the dancer shaped as philosophical reasonings around the new art of dance. A common path in their sonnets and writings about her is the description of Isadora's natural and childish dancing in her attempt to re-create ancient dances. Both writers had a deep understanding of Greco-Romano art and both were aware of the changes that were happening in the dance art. With regards to Darío, Gimferrer states:

[Rubén Darío] was sustained by an admirable perception of nature and a true familiarity with the vision of the world that Greek and Latin literature holds for us [...] Rubenian paraphernalia is that of someone who has received a classical education, but it is not the one of a classic: neither that of a strict contemporary of ours, although that of a man of our times. Neither classic nor contemporary nor romantic: modern, or rather, modernist (Gimferrer 1987, pp. xviii-xix).

For his side, Max Eastman's statement is as follows: 'To me, who had nourished my youth both on the straight clear thinking of the Greeks and in Walt Whitman's affirmation of the majesty of natural passions, declining the choice between romantic and classic, she [Isadora Duncan] seemed as near as anything. I have experienced to a divine revelation' (1942, p. 72). Hence, we can assume that both poets recognised Duncan's dance as an embodiment of their own ideas and principles.

The ekphrastic depiction of Duncan's movements as childish and natural is also found in 'An ode to a dancer' (1920) by Witter Bynner (New York, 1881-Santa Fe, 1968).

This American poet, a supporter of civil rights for African-Americans and women was friends with significant people, including Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg, Igor Stravinsky and, naturally, Isadora Duncan (Stanford 1983, p. 390; Hall 2012, p. 253; Harvard Square Library, 'Bynner, Witter').

Isadora Duncan requested Bynner to translate *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Yezzi 2020, para. 4.; Hall 2021, p. 250), a Greek tragedy that she had previously choreographed in 1903: 'Isadora Duncan said one day, "If only there were a simple English version of Iphigenia, as human, as the Greek, no rhymes, no inversions, no loss of meaning in the sound!"'

ISADORA DUNCAN'S TRIUMPH.

Tremendous Enthusiasm at Her Farewell Performance in London.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, Aug. 1.—Isadora Duncan, who has been appearing at the Duke of York's Theatre under Charles Frohman's management, concluded her series of terpsichorean interpretations of Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis" Thursday night.

Her season here has been most successful from both the artistic and the financial point of view. The Queen and the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and their daughter, Princess Patricia, have been to see her, and her farewell performance Thursday aroused the tremendous enthusiasm of a packed house. The stage was heaped with floral tributes, among the number a huge wreath standing almost as high as Miss Duncan herself, intertwined with American and English flags.

I understand that the troupe of children whose dancing was an attractive feature of Miss Duncan's performance, will not accompany her to New York, to which she sails next Saturday, but even without them, and once the principle of bare-legged dancing on a public stage be admitted, Miss Duncan's classic representation stands easily the highest in point of artistic beauty among the several performances of the kind seen in London.

However, Miss Duncan's performance has received some criticism. One reviewer says:

"During Miss Duncan's dancing display I found myself longing for more light and more simple lighting on our stage. Given this, I think people would be able to come at the true value of Miss Duncan's new dancing easily enough, though there has been little good dancing in our time. On a poorly lighted stage, draped with dun-colored curtains, Miss Duncan's imitations of the dancing figures on old Greek and Roman vases and urns are passably suggestive of the models they are studied from. How much they lack of the beauty, the perfect balance, the spontaneity, and expression of emotion of the originals would be abundantly evident if she danced in a strong, ordinary colored light. Even in the dimness of an orange or blue one the imperfections of her figure and costumes are all too apparent."

Figure 7. 'Isadora Duncan's Triumph', *The New York Times*, August 2, 1908. An article about Isadora Duncan's last performance of the season of *Iphigenia in Aulis* at the Duke of York's Theatre in London. It states that the whole season was successful. Some of the most significant attendees of her performances were the Queen and the Duchess and Duke of Connaught. The only negative critic that the season received was about the poor stage lighting.

And when I wrote her this, she liked and used it. Therefore the blame or praise be partly hers' (Bynner in Euripides 1915, 'Dedication') Duncan used music by Christoph Willibald Gluck and incorporated excerpts of *Iphigenia in Aulis* in her choreography. Augustin Duncan staged this Bynner's version of *Iphigenia*, in which all the Isadorables performed. It premiered on 13th March 1915 at the Carnegie Hall, New York City.

Duncan's earlier *Iphigenia*, a work in which she united both *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, was based completely on Gluck's eighteenth-century homonymous French operas (Hall 2012, p. 183). Although Duncan premiered this drama ballet *circa* 1903, she kept working on it for over a decade. It is worth mentioning that the choreographer Pina Bausch (Solingen, 1940-Wuppertal, 2009), whose dance-theatre followed Duncan's principles of free dance, also revived Gluck's *Iphigenia in Tauris* when she became the artistic director of the Wuppertal Opera Ballet company in 1975. Witter Bynner's 'An Ode to a Dancer' was included in a compilation of lyrics entitled *A Cantic of Pan and Other Poems*, first published in 1920. It consists of four stanzas, each with ten verses, with a



Figure 8. Cutting from the article 'Isadora Duncan's Triumph', *The New York Times*, August 2, 1908. The prints illustrate Isadora Duncan wearing Greek robes. The central is a print of the photograph entitled 'Isadora Duncan with her Pupils' by Paul Berger. This photograph was probably taken during one of their performances at the Duke of York's Theatre in London in 1908. According to the article, the young apprentices did not continue touring with Duncan when she came back to New York City.

consonant rhyme scheme in ABABCDEDCE and an iambic pentameter. The opening stanza reveals the poem's intertext, which is John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. In Keats' ode two dynamic scenes from a fictional ancient Greek urn are ekphrastically described.

'An ode to a dancer' is about an Isadora Duncan who is reborn when Keats' urn is upturned and the ashes released. The image of Duncan made by the ashes is reinforced with the last line of the poem, where the poetic 'I' switches to allow the dancer to speak for herself, who claims 'O urn! Take back my ashes! It is I!' (Bynner 1920, line 40). These lines allude to Isadora not only as a Greek dance inspired dancer, but as an ancient Greek dancer herself in a modern world. Namely, Duncan works as a time bridge between different ages, a person who lived, is living and will live in the past, present, and future: 'And yet thy lips of poesy could blow / Both lives, until their ankles met and glanced / Between the dead world and the unborn earth' (Bynner 1920, lines 8-10).

The first three lines of the third stanza describe and explain the origin of the dancer's motions: 'Life rises rippling through her like a spring, / Or like a stream it flows with deepening whirl. / Leaves in a wind taught her that fluttering / Of finger tips [...]' (Bynner 1920, lines 21-24). Duncan's internal energy is compared to the fall of a spring and that of a stream. As we know, the energy that moves these water bodies does not need human intervention, it only follows natural law. This poetic image is consistent with one of Isadora's dance statements. She believed that the dancer should watch nature's movements, receive them interiorly and, only then, express and act them out. Furthermore, in the ode, the leaves and wind were not only Duncan's source of inspiration but her mentors. This idea goes beyond Duncan's pronouncement that nature was her model:

At the villa in Abbazia there was a palm-tree before our windows [...] I used to notice its leaves trembling in the early morning breeze, and from them I created in my dance that light fluttering of the arms, hands, and fingers which has been so much abused by my imitators; for they forget to go to the original source and contemplate the movements of the palm-tree, to receive them inwardly before giving them outwardly (Duncan 1968, p. 119).

In Witter's ode, the literary device known as prosopoeia or personification is used to give life to the leaves and wind so that they can teach the dancer how to move. The four last lines of the same stanza are dedicated to describing Duncan as a wild and lighthearted girl:

A lovely melancholy being, wild
With remembering, with groping to attain
The edge and entrance of a wilderness,
To play again, untroubled as a child.
(Witter 1920, lines 27-30)

The poet places the dancer at the edge and entrance of a 'wilderness' space, which could refer either to a virtual space, in which case we would find ourselves again with the topos of Isadora Duncan dancing in a *locus amoenus*, like in Eastman's poem; or it could also be a metaphor that Isadora's dancing is halfway between natural and cultured. Natural because of the character of her movements but cultured since her dancing is based on ancient Greek philosophy.

The fact that Witter Bynner dedicated an ode to Isadora Duncan, namely, a lyrical composition whose aim, traditionally, is to pay homage to the subject that it is devoted to, demonstrates his knowledge and admiration for the dancer's intellectual and performing work. Thus, 'An Ode to a Dancer' reflects the characteristics of the dancer that the poet considered worthy of being sung in a panegyric text.

In the same vein, the American poet Carl Sandburg (Illinois, 1878-Fall Rock 1967), in his poem 'Isadora Duncan', highlighted the way the dancer performed according to laws of nature. This poem is part of *Breathing Tokens* (1978), a posthumous anthology of 118 poems. The poems, of which the majority are undated, were gathered and published by the poet's daughter Margarete Sandburg. 'Isadora Duncan' consists of three strophes, the first one is four verses long, and the second and third ones are five lines long. The poem is written in free verse.

The opening strophe presents the idea of Duncan encountering natural phenomena and elements. While she became part of them, they became an inherent part of her dancing:

She was a flame sheath of flesh made for dancing.
She believed she ran out into storm, rain, sun, and
became part of them and they were afterward woven
in her dances.

(Sandburg 1978, lines 1-4).

In the second strophe, just like in ‘An Ode to a Dancer’, the poetic ‘I’ gives the floor to Isadora, who states that earthly entities are not her inspirational sources, she has become them. She is a compendium of natural elements who expresses her persona through dance. Her dancing is authentic since it reflects what she is, namely a compilation that includes the actions, feelings, emotions, beliefs, and states of all kinds of living things:

“The wind? I am the wind. The sea and the moon?
I am the sea and the moon. Tears, pain, love, bird-
flights? I am all of them. I dance what I am.
“Sin, prayer, faith, the light that never was on land
or sea? I dance what I am”.

(Sandburg 1978, lines 5-9).

The words that Sandburg put in Isadora’s mouth are highly consistent with her dance theory:

If we seek the real source of the dance, if we go to nature, we find that the dance of the future is the dance of the past, the dance of eternity, and has been and will always be the same. The movement of waves, of winds, of the earth is ever in the same lasting harmony [...] Man, arrived at the end of civilization, will have to return to nakedness, not to the unconscious nakedness of the savage, but to the conscious and acknowledged nakedness of the mature Man, whose body will be the harmonious expression of his spiritual being (Duncan 1977, pp. 54-55).

Although Sandburg features Duncan as a natural being, he does not forget to note her human side: ‘Sin, prayer, faith’. Isadora aimed to ‘speak the language of humanity’ (Duncan 1981, p. 47), and these three words—even when they are attached to a specific beliefs system—, as concepts, are part of humankind’s moral behaviour. The most decisive reminder that the poet gives us of Duncan as a human being is found in the last stanza of the poem, in which he writes about the death of the dancer. This last strophe is analysed in the section ‘A Tragic Ending’. As we are going to see in my next section, Sandburg is not the only one who features Duncan as a liminal being whose human materiality can be seen, but also her non-human qualities—her natural and divine capabilities—can be captured by the spectator’s eyes.

I cannot confirm that Sandburg met Duncan. As I mentioned above, Duncan and Sandburg were part of the same social network as Witter Bynner. Moreover, Sandburg was the brother-in-law of Edward Steichen, an American-Luxembourgish photographer who made portraits and photographs of Duncan and her dancers, including the series of photos of Isadora at the



Figure 9. Portrait of Isadora Duncan by Edward Steichen, 1913. Collection SFMOMA.

Parthenon (see figures 3 and 9). Sandburg was also the editor and annotator of the biography *Steichen the Photographer*. These two facts indicate that Duncan and Sandburg probably met in person. Either way, Sandburg's poem is another written testimony of how much the poets admired both Isadora Duncan's movements and her reflections upon a renovated dance founded on nature.

3.2 Divinity

The presentation of Duncan as a Goddess or as a person with qualities of a God who manifests herself as natural forces throughout her dancing is a subject addressed by four of my chosen writers. The concept of divinity, as well as the concept of natural dancing seen in the previous section, is directly related to the Greek influx in Duncan's dancing. The present section analyses four poems that share the topic of divinity and explores how this is related with Duncan's dance theory.

'With something of an animal and of divinity' is the third verse of Darío's sonnet 'The Dancer with Bare Feet'. The picture of Duncan dancing animalistically contrasts, or, failing that, complements, the image of the dancer as a divine entity. Hervé Le Corre argues that, when Darío features Duncan as a divine animal, he foregrounds the eroticism of the dancer,

eroticism already highlighted in the article 'Miss Isadora Duncan' (2016, p. 130). This erotism arises from the simple fact that Isadora's body was easy to appreciate through the translucent costumes that she wore for her performances, which seemed to be nothing but a second skin on her body.²²

Although Duncan's performances were distinguished for being erotic, I consider, on one hand, that the divinisation of her persona in Darío's sonnet has its roots in the paganism recognised by Darío in the dancer's art. Darío, in his article, had already reflected upon this subject. He declared that Isadora makes poetry and art with her body as a muse, as a nymph, and as a priestess would do. He wrote that she was Eurydice, Echo, Ariadne, Aglaea, Euphrosyne, Thalia, and Terpsichore (1918b, pp. 148-153). The first five of these mythological females are characterised by their beauty and intelligence, features that made male characters fall in love with them (Orfeo with Eurydice, Zeus with Echo, Dionysius with Ariadne; while Aglaea symbolises beauty and intelligence, and Euphrosyne is the goddess of joy and happiness). And by calling her Thalia and Terpsichore, Darío features Duncan as the muses who inspire bucolic poets and dancers. And finally, Darío claims that her paganism not only comes from the Greek influx but also from the artists of the Renaissance who, if they had known her, would have made portraits and lyrics after her (p. 154). Hence, it is more likely that when Darío deifies the dancer, he does so with the desire to establish her as an entity who can, to some extent, separate herself from her own mundane carnality. And I say to some extent because she cannot leave behind her animal condition.

On the other hand, if we consider the essential features of the Modernismo movement, in particular the feature known as 'aestheticism', we recognised that the poets had a preference for beautiful and ideal subjects such as poetry and art, love and eroticism. They were more inclined to write about exotic, magical, and fantastic things than about real things. And, as a consequence of this, they preferred to put into words what they imagined rather than issues

²² Ruben Darío, in 'Miss Isadora Duncan', dedicates a paragraph to write about Duncan's costume: 'Her body is barely covered with a type of kimon: at other times she wears botticelesque tunics, and always that fine clothe seems as it were wet. There are not tights underneath, and a completely artistic disregard is needed, or an effort of intellectuality which not all the spectators in the theatre are capable of (1918b, p. 150). Namely, if a Duncan's spectator suppresses their capacity for artistic and intellectual reasoning, they will inevitably fall into the conception of the dancer's body within the pure framework of eroticism.

from the reality that surrounded them (Carilla 1988, p. 172). Thus, the divinisation of an admired person by the poet is suitable for a modernismo poem since that individual can be presented as an ethereal and ideal being.

For his side, the philosopher and poet John Cowper Powys (Shirley, Derbyshire, 1872-Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1963), wrote his lyrical poem 'To Isadora Duncan', included in *Mandragora Poems* and published in 1917. No assurance can be given that John Powys saw Duncan performing in a theatre. It is my understanding that he was going to attend Duncan's *Iphigenia* in Paris in 1913. However, Powys told his friend Frances Greggs in a letter dated April 18, 1913, that he and his agent Arnold Shaw instead of going to see Duncan, they went to Folies Bergere cabaret (Stimpson 2014, p. 2). Yet there are some documents and facts that evidence the friendship between Powys and Duncan.

Isadora, in 1915, sent roses to Powys' flat after she read his book of essays entitled *Visions and Revisions*, where he wrote about some of Duncan's favourite writers such as Walt Whitman and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (Mitchell 2014, p. 101; Stimpson 2014, p. 2). Cowper Powys communicated this event to his brother Llewelyn in a letter dated November 18, 1917. Furthermore, Fredrika Blair states that John Cowper sent a letter to Duncan, probably in May or June 1915, to find 'a source of strength in Isadora's compassion' (1986, p. 447) while the poet was recovering from a surgery.²³ Due to the admiration that Isadora had for Powys, she performed for him in the hospital. Moreover, in 1917, Isadora Duncan danced for Powys' again, this time at his flat in Greenwich Village, New York. And a month after, on October 17 of the same year, he wrote a letter to his brother declaring that 'She [Isadora Duncan] has been one of the most thrilling sensations—but that is a wretched word to express it—of my whole existence [...] It was as though Demeter herself, the *mater dolorosa* of the ancient earth, rose and danced' (*apud* Stimpson 2014, p. 1).

²³ Fredrika Blair includes an extract of this letter from John Cowper Powys to Isadora Duncan: 'I am still seized with that sort of whoreson lethargy...which seems like an insane terror of having to undertake the struggle of life again. In the effort not to yield to this weakness I keep making use of your friendship, I keep an almost fierce hold on your hand. I seem to see you always with a secret of courage and of some wonderful terrible kind of ecstasy that is sable to defy everything and springs from the very depths. This is your genius and there is none like you in this' (1986, p. 447).

Moreover, Francis Powys, John's brother, and the researcher Florence Marie-Laverrou (2010) assert that the protagonist characters of John Powys' novel *After My Fashion*, completed in 1920 but not published until 1980, are based on Isadora and on Cowper themselves.²⁴ Elise and Richard Storm are the names of these characters. The first is a dancer, and the latter is a poet. They hold an extra-marital relationship, and the poet never stops extolling the virtues of the dancer. Throughout the novel there are some hints that match some biographical facts of Duncan and Powys's lives. Although we must not forget that it is a fictional work, this novel can work as a testimony of the Duncan-Powys friendship.

'To Isadora Duncan' opens with the following verses:

With the gesture of a god,
You gave me back my youth;
And a scent of violets
Overflowed the world.
(Powys 1917, lines 1-4)

It is composed of 29 verses, and the first line is repeated three more times throughout the first 18 lines of the poem, marking the main subject of the text: the omnipotent capabilities of Isadora. David Stimpson maintains that this is a panegyric poem (2014, p. 3), namely, a highly laudatory text whose aim is to praise the attributes of the evoked subject. If we read it as a panegyric poem, the first verse can work as the exordium of the poetic discourse that it is followed by the enunciation of the virtues of the honoured dancer. These attributes include Duncan's power to give the poetic 'I' back his youth and love; to bring back hope, freedom, and triumph 'To those whom the world has crushed', and to lift 'Those that had fallen—' (Powys 1917, line 22).

The conclusion of the poem begins with a scene that presents us the poetic 'I', again, as a spectator of a dance event:

²⁴ 'There can be no doubt but that Isadora Duncan is the model from which Elise the dancer in *After My Fashion* was drawn' (Powys, Francis, Foreword to *After My Fashion*, apud Marie-Laverrou 2010, p. 64).

All of us, sitting in darkness,
Saw a great light.
You danced as dance the morning stars
And the universe was conquered.
(Powys, 1917, lines 23-26)

‘Us’ include the people listed above but may also refer to all those who actually witnessed Duncan dancing in a theatre. Likewise, that ‘darkness’ reminds us of a theatre in which the audience is sitting in the dark before the spotlights lit and the show begins. However, the metaphorical sense of darkness carries more weight if we conceive it as weak or negative state of mind, derived from tortuous events, that will be healed with the light that the dancer reverberates over her watchers. Thus, Duncan appears as a revitalizing light that comes into play on the stage, or that, in a metaphorical sense, lights up after a stormy night just like the stars.

The poem ends declaring that ‘You [Isadora Duncan] smote the universe in the mouth; / And you saved us— / You — a woman’ (Powys 1917, lines 27-29). Here, by way of apotheosis, Duncan becomes the saviour of humankind. Nevertheless, as seen in Carl Sandburg’s poem (see p. 60), she cannot completely abandon her human condition. Even when Powys effusively endows Duncan with extraordinary virtues throughout the poem, at the end, she is not a god—she only gestured as a god—but a woman who returns to her spectators all the virtues, such as love, youth, freedom, and triumph, that they considered lost.

In the same vein, Joel Elias Spingarn (New York City, 1875-1939) wrote the poem ‘To Isadora Duncan, Dancing’, included in *Poems*, an anthology of Spingarn’s works published in 1924. The last two stanzas of this poem were previously published in Edward Dickson’s compilation *Poems of Dance* of 1921, with an Introduction by Louis Untermeyer. I lack the necessary evidence to verify if J. E. Spingarn saw Isadora Duncan dancing and/or if they met.²⁵ However, what can be assured is that the poet knew Duncan’s dance principles and that had a good idea of her expressive intentions when dancing on a stage.

²⁵ I consider that it is plausible that Joel Elias Spingarn saw Isadora Duncan performing based on the way the poem is written, namely, on the fact that the poetic ‘I’ is a spectator of Duncan’s dancing. Furthermore, this poem shares characteristics with other poems whose authors attended one or more of the dancer’s performances. However, these facts are not definitive evidence that the poet really saw the dance act.

‘To Isadora Duncan, Dancing’ is a poem with six stanzas of variable number of alexandrine verses, namely, verses of 12 syllables. Some of the verses are separated by a caesura marked by a line break in the last, penultimate, or antepenultimate syllables. The poem is composed of unrhymed trochaic verses. Although the verses are unrhymed, the musicality of the poem is given by its regular metre and by the use of the poetic device of repetition as follow: ‘*Dance* of Shiva, *dance* of Hopi, *dance* of Dervish (Spingarn 1924, line 11) or ‘*Long ago* the heathen black folk of the jungle / Called you goddess, *long ago* the grey Egyp- / tians’ (lines 7-8) and ‘*Long ago*, in rite and myth, the Greek en- / shrined you; / ’ (line 10). In the first case the repetition of the word ‘dance’ emphasises the importance of this art form within the whole text, gaining its position as an essential subject in the text. And the repetition of the adjective ‘long ago’ is used to reiterate the metaphorical antiqueness of Duncan and to highlight that the devotion to the dancer has not only pertained to her contemporaries but to people from all times.

The second and the last stanza are relevant for the topic of divinity. In the second stanza, Isadora Duncan is featured as a goddess. She is characterised as a being that, through dancing, can break her mundane form and embody divine entities of different beliefs systems allocated all around the world: black pagan from the jungle, and ancient Egyptian and Greek:

Long ago the heathen black folk of the jungle
 Called you goddess, long ago the grey Egyp-
 tians
 Carved an altar for you in their towering
 temples;
 Long ago, in rite and myth, the Greek en-
 shrined you;
 (Spingarn 1924, lines 7-10)

Regardless of race or ethnicity, the dancer is worshipped as a goddess to whom tribute is paid either using the word or using a material structure. In the first way since they *called* her goddess, among the people of the jungle, and because she was part of the Greek myths, which were communicated verbally. In the second way, because the Egyptians raised altars for her worship, consecrating in that way a material structure to pay her tribute.

The next line, ‘Dance of Shiva, dance of Hopi, dance of / Dervish,’ (Spingarn 1924, line 11) may suggest that Duncan is an incarnation of the Hindu god Shiva; a deity from the pantheon of the native American Hopi tribe (possibly the god Taiwoa, the Creator), and the God of the



Figure 10. ‘Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)’. The Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, Gallery 240. The drum or damaru, which Shiva holds on his upper right hand, is ‘the symbol of the origin of the word or of the word itself, the original matter of all life, represents creation, while the fire [which he carries in the palm of his left rear hand] symbolizes annihilation because, at the end of any age, fire will devour the world’ (Schleberger 2004, p. 95). The fire halo that circles the sculpture represents the infinite cycle in which beginning and end join.

monotheistic Islamic Sufi Dervish fraternity. If we interpret that Duncan is these different gods themselves, then we would be talking about a Duncan that is like a supreme and mythical deity, creator of the universe, livelihood of humans, and representative of various spiritual belief frameworks. However, we can also interpret that Duncan’s dances are an equivalent of the ritual dances²⁶ that humans, as in an act of devotion, dedicate to Shiva, the Hopi God and the Islamic God, to maintain order in the world.

For instance, the image of Duncan as Shiva is interesting since this god, in its Naṭarāja form, is the god of dance and is the deity responsible for the destruction/creation of the cosmos.²⁷ Naṭarāja dances the dance Tandava to destroy the world every cosmic

²⁶ ‘Ritual is a formal method to remember the acts of the supernatural beings in past times. The recitation of the ritual makes that deities pay attention again to the actions done by them and for them’ (Linton *apud* Martí, 1961, p. 11). When dance becomes an essential element of a ritual there can be an identification between the creations and the creators. Thus, ritual dance creates an intrinsic bond between deities and humans.

²⁷ In the Hindu religion there is a tripartite process (Trimūrti) of cosmic creation. The creator god, Brahma, is the first cause of everything that exists; the god Vishnu is the maintainer of the Universe; and the god Shiva is the one who represents the principle of destruction. At the same time, each of these gods is accompanied by a feminine aspect that is conceived as their active power. Brahma creates Saraswati, through meditation, to satisfy his own desire of reproduction. Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and beauty, is the feminine aspect of Vishnu, and that of Shiva is Parvati, the goddess of the mountain. It is in the Padma Purāna where we find the information about this trinity system: ‘In beginning of creation, the great Vishnu, desirous of creating the whole world, became threefold: Creator, Preserver, Destroyer. In order to create this world, the Supreme Spirit

cycle. Shiva besides the act of destruction, also represents other cosmic processes or *krtyas*: creation, conservation, annihilation, concealment, and redemption. Thus, Shiva represents the end of all things and new life, which arises from destruction, because ‘Dissolution is seen, more than as an apocalyptic extermination, as a reabsorption of what was created within the Being’ (Cross 1994, p. 24). These antagonist cosmic energies are represented in the iconography of Nataraja, where the body position, attributes, and gestures present Shiva as the Lord of Dance. In the case in which Duncan were Shiva himself, then her dances would be the Tandava dance, namely, her dancing would be a divine act capable of creating, sustaining, and destroying the world. However, with ‘Dance of Shiva, dance of Hopi, dance of / Dervish,’ the poetic ‘I’ could also suggest that Duncan’s performance is like the dances that Shiva devotees dance in honour of their god. In this case, Duncan would be reinterpreting and reproducing the dance that Shiva had mythically performed and that nowadays is performed by the Shaivites to be granted salvation and spiritual bliss. In the same line, Duncan’s dances can have the same ritualistic and ceremonial functions of the dances of the Hopi tribe, who with their Snake Dance, to name one, help the community with health, good weather conditions, and fertility (Udall 2001, p. 238).

Moreover, if we interpret Duncan’s dancing as a version of the Dervish ritual dance *samâ* (which means ‘to listen to the music’), then she would be seeking to reach the origin of perfection, the aim of the Dervish dance, which is a way of meditation through which the practitioner must abandon their personal desires, listen to the music, and think about God. The movements that the dancers do are concentric circles around their own axis.²⁸ Annemarie Schimmel explains, ‘Jalaluddin Rumi, the founder of the Mevlevi Order in the thirteenth

produced from his right side of his body himself as Brahmâ; then, in order to preserve the world, he produced from the left side Vishnu; and in order to destroy the world, he produced from the middle of his body the eternal Siva. Some worship Brahmâ, others Vishnu, others Siva; but Vishnu, one, yet threefold, creates, preserves and destroys: therefore let the pious make no difference between the three (Dowson 2004, *Tri-murti*, pp. 320-321).

²⁸ ‘In the interior of the Tekke (convent) reigns a shady atmosphere and the soft music of flute and tambourines. In the center of a circular hall, men clad in black and with long cylindrical hats are bowing towards an elderly man with a white beard, seated with his back erect and his arms crossed. Slowly moving away, the Dervishes form a large circle, while the music slowly changes rhythm with the sound of the ney, the Turkish flute [...] After a long period of meditation the dervishes get up, again forming a circle [...] Their expressions are so much out of this world that their eyes look without seeing [...] One by one they remove their black attire, symbolizing the separation from the ego [...] Slowly, raising the right arm towards the sky while the left arm points to the earth, the dervishes begin to move very slowly around themselves and around the center’ (Ezren 2008, paras. 10-11).

century says that the dancing dervishes represent the solar system and the planets that revolve around the sun. At the same time that they are immersed in their own microcosmos, they create new worlds and make contact with eternity' (*apud* Erzen 2008, para. 13). Hence, considering that Dervish belief, Duncan would be joining the dance of the planets, dancing to the rhythm of the cosmos, 'as the way to unite with the cosmic powers and also with eternity' (para. 15). This image of Duncan dancing as a Dervish leads us to the last verse of this stanza: 'All the planets whirl with you along their orbits' (Spingarn 1924, line 12). This line presents a dancer joining to the choreography of the cosmos but could also suggest that the universe is the one who joins her dancing. This idea is compatible with Duncan's assertion that 'The dance should simply be, then, the natural gravitation of this will of the individual, which in the end is no more nor less than a human translation of the gravitation of the universe' (Duncan 1977, p. 55). The will she refers to is given to each individual—whether a planet or a human being—by the forces that surround it and that concentrate in it. For instance, when Isadora declared that the rhythm for her art was taken from 'water in motion, from the blowing of the winds' (p. 78), she was alluding to this channelling of natural forces into motion. For her, the main aim of dancing is to follow that given impulse or will and express it through movement.

Overall, Spingarn's poem presents Duncan as a timeless and worshipped divine entity who has been present in different human civilisations. In this poem, as well as in the poems previously analysed in this section, the dancer is deprived of her human condition to be hyperbolically and panegyrically presented as a superior being.

Isadora Duncan, in her essay 'Movement is Life' asserted that 'The architect, the sculptor, the painter, the musician, the poet, all understand how the idealization of the human form and the consciousness of its divinity are the root of all art created by man. A single artist has lost this divinity, an artist who above all should be the first to desire it—the dancer' (in Duncan, 1977, p. 79). Duncan was a dancer and choreographer who followed her own dance philosophical principles. However, the poets seen here, by leaving a hyperbolic verbal testimony of what the dancer expressed in her performances, concretise the dance ideals once expressed by Duncan herself. In literary terms, when something is verbally expressed, it

becomes true. When a writer needs to introduce a character or an object to his text, they only need to write down the correct words to make that object 'exist'. Hence these poets, with their words, made Duncan a goddess and made her achieve a divine status to which every dancer, according to her, should aspire.

3.3 The End

Isadora Duncan died on 14th September 1927 in Nice in a car accident. Her death and the way she passed away has been considered a relevant subject worthy of being emulated through poetic language. Three of the authors who compose my corpus of work, Carl Sandburg, David Huerta (Mexico City, 1949), and Armando Rubio Huidobro (1955-Santiago de Chile, 1980), refer to her death in their texts. As I mentioned at the end of the section entitled 'Natural and Puerile Dancing', it is plausible that Carl Sandburg met Duncan in person. In his poem, Sandburg writes about the characteristics of Duncan's art but also, in the last three verses of his poem, he alludes to the dancer's decease. Meanwhile, the Latin American poets Huerta and Rubio did not see Isadora dancing nor meet her because they were writing after she died, but her peculiar

death is a theme covered in their poems. This section addresses three poems that portray with verbal language the impressions that Isadora Duncan's passing created on the mind of three different poets who did not witness that incident but who consider it relevant for their works.

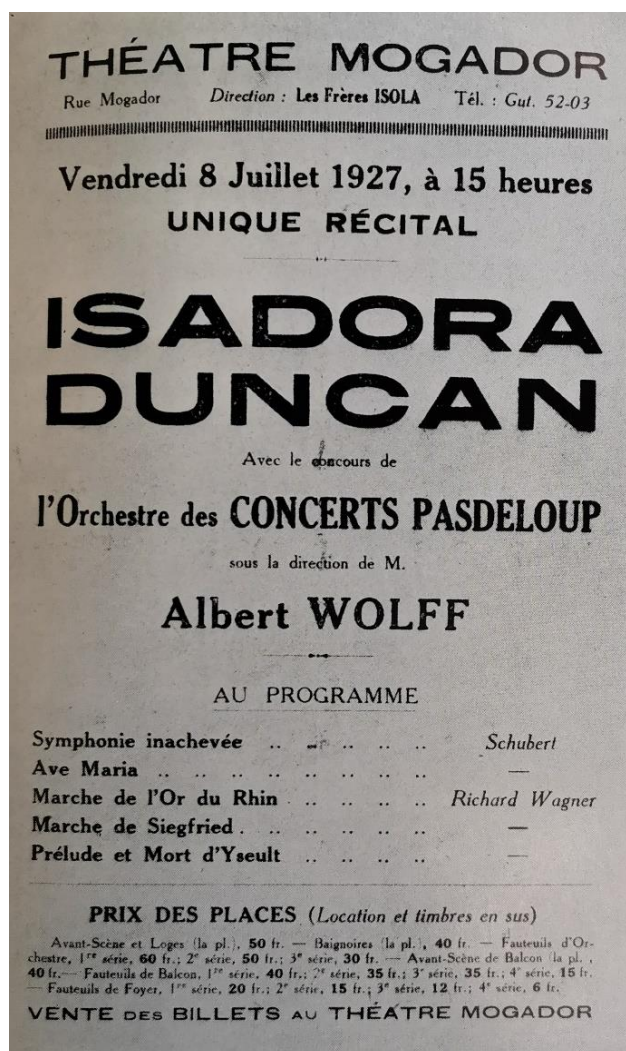


Figure 11. Hand programme of Isadora Duncan's last performance of her life. Imagen taken from Mary Desti, *Isadora Duncan's End*, 1927.

In her book *Isadora Duncan's End* (1927), Mary Desti, Duncan's intimate friend who witnessed the car accident, wrote about how Isadora spent her last days and tells us what happened on the night of 14th September. Desti states that Duncan and Benoît Falchetto, alias 'Bugatti', who the dancer held a relationship with, rode a convertible sports car when leaving Desti's property, after a meeting that they had in her house. Bugatti was driving and Duncan was the passenger. That night, Duncan was wearing a shawl that Desti once gave to her:

Isadora dressed as she was in her pleated skirt, and the famous Chinese red shawl that I had painted for her. This shawl was two yards long and sixty inches wide, of heavy crepe, with a great yellow bird almost covering it, and blue Chinese asters and Chinese characters in black-a marvellous thing, the light of Isadora's life [...] She threw her red painted shawl about her throat, and shook her head. She said: "Adieu, mes mis. Je vais a la gloire".²⁹ Those were the last words Isadora Duncan ever spoke. One minute after she was dead' (Desti 1929, pp. 335; 338).

According to Desti, the open car stopped after a few metres. She ran towards Bugatti and Isadora only to see that the dancer was still on the floor. Desti asked for medical aid, but doctors confirmed that Isadora died instantly when the edge of the shawl was caught by the car wheel, causing her suffocation, and dragging her to the floor:

There were no mudguards on the car, and as Isadora threw her shawl around her neck and across her shoulder, the heavy fringe, hanging down behind, caught in the rear wheel on her side. Naturally a few revolutions of the wheel dragged her head forward, crushing her face against the side of the car and holding it as in a vice. The very first revolutions of the wheel had broken her neck, severing the jugular vein, and, as she had always wished, had killed her instantly, without one second's pain or knowledge of what was happening' (Desti 1927, pp. 339-340).

Duncan's body was cremated in the cemetery Père-LaChaise and, according to Desti, all types of artists attended the funeral (1929, p. 347).

²⁹ The American poet Glenway Wescott affirms that Mary Desti changed the last words pronounced by Isadora Duncan. What supposedly Duncan said was 'Je vais a l'amour'. However, Desti changed those words to 'Je vais a la gloire', a sentence with a more prophetic sense (Owens, Mitchell and Allan Tamarkin, 'Our Isadora'. *The New York Times*, January 20, 2002). This theory of the change of the last words of Duncan, as well as the change in the brand of the car in which the accident happened (the common version is that the car was a Bugatti, even when the brand of the car was never confirmed) are part of the legend that has been woven around Duncan's death.

The last stanza of Carl Sandburg's 'Isadora Duncan' starts with the following verses: 'Roses, lovers, money, children, came to her in her / life dance from California to Russia' (Sandburg 1978, lines 10-11). These lines enlist words that symbolise relevant things that Isadora Duncan had during her life, from her early years in California, to her days in Russia, where she lived from 1922 to 1924. *Roses* for the fame and admiration that she got from her friends and audience; *lovers* for the many people that she loved, without any social restrictions; *money* for her successful dance seasons, tours, and schools, which had good attendance and reception; *children* for Deirdre and Patrick, her two children who also died in a car accident in the River Seine.

The previous verses, that seem to be a quick glance to Isadora Duncan's life, are followed by the asseveration that Duncan's artistic career was about to end when her death happened: 'When her dancing days were not yet over but almost / come to an end, she died in a swift ride with a flame-red / scarf enwrapping her neck tighter and tighter' (Sandburg 1978, lines 12-14). In 1927 Duncan was 50 years old, she was already a senior dancer who, just like any other dancer at that age (most dancers retire at an earlier age, when they are around 35 years old), was about to reach the culmination of her dancing days. Clearly, Isadora Duncan retired unwittingly because her death came before she could decide to end her artistic career. Her death is termed by the poet as 'swift'. This adjective may allude to the velocity at which she was riding in the car, as well as to the speed at she died by an instant strangulation.

The image that the poet creates with the words 'flame-red scarf' is relevant since, at the very start of the poem, Duncan was featured as a 'flame sheath of flesh made for dancing' (Sandburg 1978, line 1). It is possible to identify the irony of these words when we realise that Isadora, a woman who was a dancing flame, was murdered by another moving flame. It is worth mentioning that the colour of the shawl is also the colour of fire, and that is how we perceive the similarity between the image of the flying scarf and that of a reverberant flame.

The red colour, present at the scene of the car accident in Sandburg's poem, was also a striking feature highlighted by the Chilean poet Armando Rubio in his poem 'Isadora', a

posthumous text included in the anthology *Ciudadano*, published in 1983 by the poet Alberto Rubio, Armando's father.³⁰

'Isadora' is a poem in free verse composed of 43 lines of variable metre, organised in seven stanzas. Each strophe is about a different subject taken from Isadora Duncan's life and the historical context in which she lived: the first stanza is about the performances of the dancer in Paris at the start of the First World War; the second is a statement about the land conflict that took the countries to start a new war; the third describes a war scenario, with places on fire, skies invaded by war planes, and governments sending their men to fight; the fourth is about the Russian revolution and about the housewives who stayed alone at home and who, as the mythological Penelope, awaited their husbands' return; the fifth is about Isadora Duncan's children riding by the Seine, alluding to the deadly accident that took place in that river; the sixth is about the social events in which Isadora danced in Europe, and Mister Singer (probably referring to Paris Singer, father of Isadora's child Patrick and son of Isaac Singer, the man who created the machines named after him) is also mentioned here. This stanza closes with the death of the dancer. Finally, the seventh strophe presents a scenario in which Duncan's children, the fallen soldiers of the war, and Sergei Yesenin, Isadora's ex-husband who died by suicide, are waiting for the dancer to arrive to the place where they are now dead. The poem closes with the assertion that Isadora keeps dancing around the world. The verses that deal with the dancer's death are the following:

The wheel already clasps the majestic
neck of Isadora:
the last lover takes her,
and he has given a red kiss on her scarf.
(Rubio 1983, lines 30-33)

The image of Isadora Duncan riding a car and wearing a scarf is described once again in this poem. Here, the wheel of the car is the one that traps the neck of the dancer. The lover who accompanies Isadora while riding the car, namely, Bugatti, seems to have a certain level of culpability since he was the one who took her and who 'put' a red kiss on the scarf. This red

³⁰ Alberto Rubio, after Armando's death, compiled all the texts that his son published in different publications such as the magazines *Atenea* and *Andrés Bello*, and the collective poetic anthologies *Poesia para el camino* and *Ganymedes/6* (Memoria Chilena, paras. 4 and 8).

kiss, undoubtedly, is associated with the red colour of the shawl that suffocated Duncan. We could also interpret that Bugatti's kiss is what dyed the scarf red. The topic of the red colour, just like in Sandburg's poem, carries weight since its connotation implies tragedy but, in this case, is also a sign of love given by Bugatti to Isadora with a kiss.

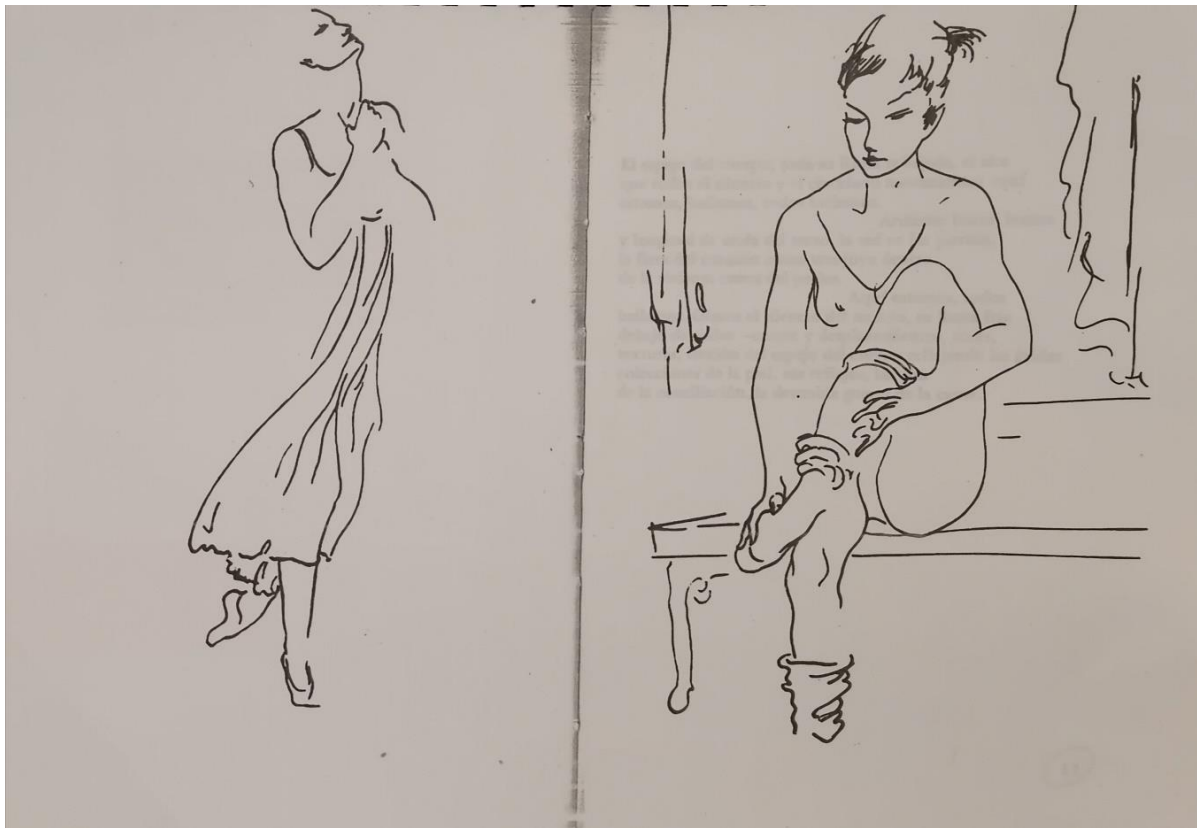


Figure 12. Untitled. Drawings by Guillermo Guzmán for David Huerta, *El Espejo del Cuerpo*, 1980, 14-15.

The third poem that covers the topic of Isadora Duncan's death is 'La bufanda de Isadora Duncan se trueca en el recuerdo' by David Huerta, part of the poetry anthology *El espejo del cuerpo* from 1980. This poetry compilation was published after being one of the winners of the International Drawing and Poetry on Dance Contest³¹ organised in by the Mexican dance company called Taller Coreográfico de la UNAM.³² Gloria Contreras, founder and director of

³¹ The other winners were the poet José Ruiz Rosas and the drawer Anhelio Hernández with *Elogio de la danza*, and the poet Mariano Flores Castro and the drawer Guillermo Zapfe with *Espectro de la danza*.

³² The Taller Coreográfico de la UNAM [National Autonomous University of Mexico] is a modern dance company that was founded in 1971 by the dancer and choreographer Gloria Contreras, who directed the company until 2015, the year of her death. Contreras, whose main vocational dance training was in New York City, brought to Mexico new and unusual ways of working, in terms of expression and body experimentation, with the dancers of the company, who were mostly Classical dancers (Luke, para. 30). Contreras created more than 250 original choreographies for this company with very eclectic music, from Johann Sebastian Bach, her

the aforementioned company, wrote for the presentation of *El Espejo del cuerpo*: ‘I have danced all my life, but I do not know what dance is —to analyse it through words. Dancing is to melt a little, it is to remove everything that is inside you. But I do not know how express it, that is why I invited the poets to express their rhythm on the rhythm, their word turned into dance. And here is the result: this word dance, which does not die instantly’ (in Huerta 1980, p. 5). With the organisation of this contest, Contreras aimed to promote an encounter between artists from different disciplines and see what the outcomes of the conjugation between visual, temporal, and space arts were in term of creation.

‘La bufanda de Isadora Duncan se trueca en el recuerdo’ is a poem composed by eight verses of sixteen syllables or hexadecasyllables. The subject is stated in the very first line: the death of Isadora Duncan and the scarf involved in it. The poem affirms that, in a kinetic or cynegetic party, the speed of the sports car that Isadora Duncan was riding, and her scarf, hunted her:

Isadora Duncan’s scarf is turned into the memory
of a kinetic, or cynegetic? party. Who moves
to hunt who?
The velocity and the scarf
hunted Isadora, in the sports car [...]
(Huerta 1980, lines 1-4)

A prosopopoeia can be noticed when the nouns *velocity* and *scarf* are personified in these verses in such a way that they are able to hunt Isadora. The scarf of the dancer became a testimony of a ‘party’ that involved movement and hunting and that took place in the car. The poetic ‘I’, rhetorically, poses the question ‘Who moves to hunt who?’. I consider that the verb ‘to move’ creates an ironic dynamic in this verse since Isadora, a person who moved during her whole life, was caught by another moving object, her scarf, in a moving entity, a car.

The following verses are ‘In the / Museum of Athens, the amphoras shudder with / a tragic laugh’ (Huerta 1980, lines 5-6). When Isadora Duncan is dead, the Greek vases, that were

favourite composer, to music by Pablo Moncayo and John Lennon (see danza UNAM). Nowadays (before the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic), the Taller Coreográfico performs every Friday at the Theatre Carlos Lazo, and every Sunday at the Miguel Covarrubias Hall, both theatres at the University Campus in Mexico City.

one of the main inspiration sources for her art, shudder and release a tragic laugh. These verses highlight the wide repercussion the dancer's death had in the world, as if her death were an echo that resonated in the remote Greek amphoras and made them sound tragically. The poem closes with a reflection upon the relentless power of 'Mistress Death': '[...] To dominate Mistress Death / who does not know how to dance, sinister sighing, atrocious wolf' (lines 7-8). My interpretation of these verses is that the Death, who is not capable of dancing, did not grant a last dance—or chance—to Isadora Duncan and, because of that, the death could not be dominated.

As seen in this section, Duncan's death was a topic within poetic works of writers from different latitudes. David Huerta and Armando Rubio Huidobro, two poets that never saw nor met Isadora Duncan because they lived in different times, vividly wrote about that famous death which, because of its peculiarity, has been treated as a mythological-like event. Clearly, the only testimonies that these poets had about that tragedy are the documents, such as articles, that other people wrote around it. However, they considered that Duncan's passing is a subject worthy of being turned into a poetic text because the car accident scene is likely to be ekphrastically re-imagined and re-presented through words. And the fact that these poets decided to write about Duncan even when she was no longer alive when these poems were written is a proof of her universal legacy. Despite her physical absence, Duncan has kept being a subject which artistic texts can be founded on.

3.4 Beyond Description: Other Ekphrastic Rhetorical Resources in Dance Poems

Karin Schlapbach poses the following question: Does an ekphrasis of a work of art usually account for the material features of the object, or the representational content, or its impact, or perhaps all these together? (2018, p. 11) As seen in the subchapter 'Ekphrasis of Dance: Preserving an Ephemeral Art', an ekphrasis is a meticulous description that artistically presents a pre-text as it was assimilated by the poet/viewer. If an ekphrastic description aims to reach a high level of vividness, then the reader will be able to 'see' the phantasia or images that the poet themselves saw and had in mind when writing the text.

Dance poems may include vivid descriptions of the features of their pre-text. The poetic descriptions of the dancer and her acts are a resource used by the poets who treated the natural movements of Duncan as seen in the section 'Natural and Puerile Dancing'. These poets, more than describing a dance piece or Isadora objectively, wrote about the qualities, artistic values, and originality of the dancer and her performance.

We have also seen that the poem can be a testimony of the impact that the dancer and the dance act had on the poet, namely, poems can include an account of the aesthetic experience of the poet in front of a dance piece. The strategy of positioning the poetic 'I' as a direct spectator who recounts what happened in the dance and feelings or thoughts provoked by the dancer was widely used in both the descriptive poems and in the poems that dealt with the topic of divinity. Even though the poet must not be confused with the poetic 'I', the tracing of the social network established between Duncan and her poets opens the possibility that these writers were eye-witnesses to Duncan's dancing.

Vivid descriptions and account of the kinetic effects of the dancer on the spectator are resources that we could appreciate in the previous sections. However, another characteristic of ekphrastic texts is that they may also include an interpretation of the watched object/subject.

3.4.1 Interpretation and Translation of the Dance Text

Louis Untermeyer's 'Isadora Duncan Dancing (Iphigenia in Aulis)' is an example of a poem written after the poet's attendance at one of Duncan's performances. Untermeyer stated that 'To have seen Isadora Duncan when she first danced to Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis" was to have seen one of beauty's swiftest and most memorable triumphs' (in Dickson 1921, p. 23), and featured Duncan's dancing as 'an ecstasy that was as bodiless as the music with which it melted—austere, consecrated, compelling' (*ibidem*). Untermeyer does not describe movements nor material elements of the performance, but focuses on the narrative side of the dance presentation. Furthermore, he enriches his poem with interpretations of the performance and adds his previous knowledge of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* plot in his text:

IV

Now the tune grows frantic,
Now the torches flare—
Wild and corybantic
Echoes fill the air.
With a sudden sally
All the voices shout;
And the bacchic rally
Turns into a rout.
Here is life that surges
Through each burning vein;
Here is joy that purges
Every creeping pain.
Even sober Sadness
Casts aside her pall,
Till with buoyant madness
She must swoon and fall...
(Untermeyer 1914, lines 30-45)

These verses are the culminating part of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Iphigenia's self-sacrifice to save Achilles and his Achaean army. This scene, which is described in the poem as boisterous, first, and then completely silent, includes a catharsis or purgation of the character. Untermeyer uses an antithetic rhetorical resource in 'Here is life that surges / Through each burning vein' to declare that (Achaean's) life comes after (Iphigenia's) death. The poem closes narrating the end of the sacrifice ceremony, which also represents the end of the dance act.

The poem above does not aim to describe Isadora Duncan's costume, dancing, art, or scenography. Instead, the poem is an interpretation of a narrative performance³³ in which the protagonist is not the figure of Duncan but a character who sacrifices herself for the good of her people.

According to Alberto Valdivia, what Louis Untermeyer did in this part of his poem was an ekphrasis that involved a pictorial-poetic³⁴ translation. This translation happens when there

³³ Narrative dances: 'Dances involving impersonation and a more or less developed plotline' (Schlapbach 2018, p. 15).

³⁴ Alberto Valdivia's article 'Ekphrasis como traducción visual y correspondencias literarias en el lenguaje pictórico desde *Museo interior* de José Watanabe' (2009) is the analysis of three poems by the Peruvian writer

is an encounter between two different semiotic systems, with different codes and channels, namely, a verbal system and a system that does not use linguistic signs—such as dance—, but these systems need to mutually decodify. In other words, when the main aim of the poets was not to write a meticulous description of their pre-text, but to represent it in a different way, they can resort to a pictorial translation. Valdivia states that there can be three different types of pictorial translation: 1) A verbal reproduction of the images presented by the painter. This translation may be of either a plastic referent or of a real referent; 2) A translation that will involve the reinterpretation or re-contextualisation of the referent, for example, when a painting represents³⁵ a reality and this reality is contextualised and explained by the poet; 3) A translation that will involve the revelation of a deep meaning treated by the plastic artist in their work (Valdivia 2009; Agudelo 2001, pp. 82-83) Untermeyer's poem falls in the second and third types of translation since it is a reinterpretation of a dance piece in which the poet not only refers to the work *Iphigenia in Aulis* but explains and contextualises the narrative behind it. Furthermore, although from Untermeyer's poem we can only create a vague idea of how Duncan's dancing was, this poem's value lays on the fact that it reveals the significance of the sacrifice of Iphigenia.

A pictorial translation will always have a referent as a specific pre-text (a painting, a dance, an event, etcetera). However, according to Valdivia, the poet will always be attached to their expressive necessities and, I would add, to the limitations of the verbal language. These conditions will provoke the poem to free itself from its pre-text. Thus, the referent will be simply an excuse for the writing of the ekphrastic poem.

The poems by David Huerta and Armando Rubio, which deal with Isadora Duncan's death, do not reconstruct a specific dance piece, but they refer to an eminent episode of the dancer's life. In this case, as these poems do not depict another work of art, they fall into the third type

José Watanabe. These poems are 'poetised pictures', or ekphrasis, of two pictures and one sculpture: *La Gallina Ciega* by Francisco José de Goya, *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, and an undetermined sculpture by George Segal. Based on the different strategies used for the writing of these ekphrasis, Valdivia concludes that there can be three different ways of poetically translating a plastic work of art. That is why he uses the term 'pictorial translation'. Although Valdivia's reflections upon translation are focused on pictorial ekphrasis, they can be applied also to the ekphrasis of other types of work of art such as dance.

³⁵ A work of art is a representation of the world and of the human condition, and an ekphrasis is a representation of that representation. Hence, ekphrastic poems are metalanguages.

of pictorial category where the poet ‘has respected the poetic art making it sufficiently independent from the link with pictorial art, so that there is no subordination and the poem is an autonomous entity and breaks into plurisignifications from the first meaning that the painting [in our case, the dancer] could represent’ (Valdivia 2009, para. 31). Huerta and Rubio’s poems relate the story behind their referent (Duncan’s life), and the dancer became an excuse for the writing of their poems.

3.4.2 Spliced Senses

A literary device used in one of the poems of my corpus is synaesthesia. This resource is utilised when the poet desires to create a poetic image where senses seem to melt together. This device can be defined as ‘The correlative use of two symbolic images whose vehicle belongs to two [or more] different kinds of sensation, but whose tenor is identical’ (Dupriez and Halsall 1991, under Correspondences).

In ‘Isadora Duncan Dancing (Chopin)’ (1914) by Louis Untermeyer the synaesthesia is evident. This poem was also published in the anthology *Challenge* in the section of Interludes. It consists of two octaves of trochaic verses with a 7/6/7/6 syllabic structure and a rhyme scheme ababcdcd efefacac. The poetic ‘I’, at the start of the poem, positions itself as a spectator of the dance act: ‘Faint preludings on a flute / And she swims before us’ (Untermeyer 1914b, lines 1-2). Once the dancer is on stage, ‘Sense and sound are intertwined’ (line 5) and the poetic ‘I’ starts experiencing an aesthetic reaction to dance and music. In the second stanza the senses of sight and hearing combine, but also the senses of smell and touch come into play:

Haunted woods and perfumed nights,
Swift and soft desires;
Roses violet-colored lights,
And the sound of lyres;
Vague chromatics on a flute –
All are subtly blended.
(Untermeyer 1914b, lines 9-14)

Perfume can be sensed from the dance and desires have the quality of being ‘soft’, as if they could be touched. This described scene culminates in a coloured music produced by the flute.

The perception of the music, an auditory phenomenon, is described in terms of the visual perception of the colours; and this alliance of sensations from different realms is what creates a synaesthetic scene. Finally, when the music ‘grows mute’ (Untermeyer 1914b, line 15), the dance and the poem end.

Joel Spingarn’s ‘To Isadora Duncan, Dancing’ also includes a synaesthetic game:

Dance, and let tired eyes, weary of seeing
only
Feed for once their fill upon immortal music;
Dance, and let the dreams of poets half forgotten,
Speak through you as never spoke their
printed pages;

Dance, and let the canvas of the
painter
Move and speak and breath and tear our
quicken heartstrings;
Dance, and in the throbbing flow of rhythm
and gesture,
Music, poetry and painting melt together.
(Spingarn 1924, lines 15-20)

Duncan feeds the eyes that watch her dancing not only with images but with music, as if the eyes were able to listen to her movements. These lines are also about how Duncan had been a source of inspiration for artists of different disciplines. She is a dancer who channels the dreams of poets. Duncan can communicate what print poems on paper had failed to express. Moreover, her dancing can provide movement and voice to paintings, as if her movements could give life to static plastic work of art. Finally, her dancing, full of rhythm and gestures, allows all the aforementioned arts to combine. With this, it is evident that the use of the synaesthesias can enrich an ekphrastic description because the reader’s sensations and perceptual faculties are summoned for a full understanding—and appreciation—of the poetic work.

Returning to Karin Schlapbach’s question about what an ekphrasis can include, either an account of material characteristics of the object/subject, a representational content, or the

impact, it can be concluded that an ekphrastic poem may include one or more of these strategies. Depending on the expressive needs of the poet, a poem can incorporate vivid descriptions of its pre-text and, at the same time, through a translation and decoding of its pre-text, it can reveal its representational meanings. In terms of Stephane Mallarmé, a poet that translates and explains dance is adding the signified to the signifier. Moreover, the ekphrastic poem can be an account of the impact that the pre-text had on the poet. This is clear in those poems whose poetic 'I' plays the role of a spectator of a dance performance. Overall, the conjugation of various rhetoric devices and strategies in dance poetry is what allows us to 'see' Isadora Duncan dancing in front of us today.

CONCLUSION

Dance and poetry had mutually enriched over time in more than one aspect. A literary text can be the primary source for the creation of a dance piece; a dance piece can be the starting point for the writing of a literary work. Both art forms have representational restrictions, and their creators are inevitably tightened to the limitations of their language. However, when there is an attempt to surpass these limitations, we have art works in which the encounter between dance and literature is successful.

Isadora Duncan was a creator who not only practised dance but also built a philosophy around the art of dance in a historical context in which the artists transgressed the boundaries of their own disciplines to explore and incorporate other artistic forms into their works, making the most of the technological and scientific advances and questioning the social changes that took place during the twentieth century. Duncan left, as a legacy to dance artists, the task of achieving creative and expressive freedom. Her response to nineteenth-century dance was, more than criticising the themes of its works (fairies, goblins, etcetera), to revolutionise its structures and its effects on the audience and on the performer themselves.

According to Isadora Duncan, dance's aim should no longer be to serve as a mere amusement but to express the inner feelings and emotions of human soul by choosing the movements that were able to express the serenity and strength of natural things, in a complex and dual dynamic where 'what was thought to be purely "self-expressive" movement is generated from the "outside" of the self's closure' (Franko 1995, p. 6). Hence, technical movements in dance must not be the main goal, but the means to express a mind-body engagement that reflects a self-consciousness. That is why Duncan's work, which has a debt with Nietzsche's work and his Dionysian metaphor, must be seen as a guide that can help us to transform our relationship with our bodies and to rediscover—or remind—ourselves that we are creative creatures that participate in the rhythm of the universe: 'Thus, when idealised as transformative practice, dance appears as an activity in which we are always losing and finding ourselves at once, participating consciously in a logic of self-creation and destruction. By proving us with a concrete experience of this rhythm, dance exercises our desire, willingness, and ability to become who we are' (LaMothe 2006, p. 224). For Duncan, self-

search through dance was meant to be an ever-lasting practice and so, as the dancer would always be becoming, they may never reach that ideal self-conscious being. Nevertheless, as Kimerer LaMothe contends, the fact that we never are is what Nietzsche considered to be the source of our joy, freedom, and love for life (p. 231). To this I would add that, from a Duncan perspective, to know our definite self may not be possible, but the willingness of getting to know ourselves is what keeps us moving, what awakens that necessity to dance inside us.

Isadora Duncan's contributions to dance were undoubtedly the founding pillars for the future development of modern dance. However, it is also worth considering the fact that dance history has, in Mark Franko (2006) and Elizabeth Francis' (1994) words, monumentalised Isadora Duncan: 'The dialectical interplay of the event of Duncan [her disruptive dances were events that reflected modernity] shifted to a reifying rhetoric that froze Duncan into a monument' (Francis 1994, p. 25). The becoming of Isadora Duncan in a mythological figure may have been a motor for writers to poetically and ekphrastically portray her in their works, depicting an idealised image of her as an expressive female artist with the mission to revolutionise dance. In their attempt to capture the ephemeral dance act by translating it into a verbal text, poets have enforced the mystery of how Duncan's choreographies were and how she actually self-expressed in them. The poems I have analysed throughout this thesis offer access to Isadora Duncan and her performances in two ways. Primarily as a disruptive dancer, choreographer, and woman, but what is also captured through these texts is an image of Isadora Duncan transformed into a liberator, goddess, legend, metaphor. In this sense, we can consider that these poems about Duncan can be read as another monument themselves, a literary dance raised for the memory of a dancer that was so important for dance history that has been turned into an object of representation, a pre-text.

The analysis of poetry of dance can have different paths. As seen in this thesis, the dance-poetry relationship can be studied from the rhythm and musicality and the importance of these two constituents in both arts. We could also explore the poet-dancer relationship since the poems can be a tribute to a specific dancer or dance movement. From a historical-cultural perspective, it is possible to find modes of communication between artists from different disciplines who shared artistic objectives, methodologies, and worldviews.

The main literary devices found in the poems analysed in this thesis are vivid descriptions, metaphors, synaesthesias, prosopoeias, repetitions, irony, hyperbolisations, panegyric tone, antithesis, and similes. Furthermore, the positioning of the poetic 'I' as a watcher of the dance was a strategy found in four poems. When the poetic 'I' sets itself as a spectator, it proceeds to give an account of its aesthetic, namely, the impact that the dancer and her actions had on it. Moreover, in one poem, an interpretation and explanation of the what the dance represented and meant was included. These two strategies, plus the inclusion of vivid descriptions, are related to the use of ekphrasis as a discursive method that helps with the translation of a kinetic text into a linguistic one. The identification of these rhetorical patterns was the result of analysing dance poetry under the concept of ekphrasis. Overall, ekphrasis is only one of the multiple expression possibilities and strategies available for modern creators whose aim was to broaden their aesthetic horizons by incorporating an alien language into their works.

Although no artwork can replace another artwork, dance poetry offers a good idea of what happened in the dance world in the twentieth century. The relevance of tracing the artistic and social connections between Isadora Duncan and her poets lays on the importance given to the poet as a live witness of possibly real and specific dances. Poets who did not live in Duncan's times emphasised the impact that her death and legacy had on them and the world. In this sense, although the poems are an internalisation of what the poet saw and experienced, they offer an alternative history of dance, namely, a history told by the artists who saw Isadora Duncan dancing and who wrote their poetic texts within the same historical context in which the dance act was performed (whether they depicted her as a subject or as a representation object), as well as a cultural history of poetry.

Hence, I propose that not only historical but artistic sources, like poems and literary essays, are important to trace the history of dance. I assert this not only because poets could capture a momentary act that would probably already be missed, but also because they offer an additional layering of context since both dance acts and literary texts were produced within the same historical moments and poets can offer knowledge about how dance was developing. Likewise, it is important to record the reflections and philosophies that have been

made around dance, since the trends and ruptures that have occurred in different dance movements have had intellectual basis. In this sense, poets, chroniclers, and literary dance writers have contributed to the writing of the history of this discipline. These writers were the ones who witnessed and reflected on the dance at the time of its execution, a moment that, if it had not been captured verbally, we would have no record of how it was performed. However, we must always be aware of what are the limitations of using artistic texts as historiographical testimonies. This thesis supplies a groundwork for a further research to take place to determine how an artistic text, like a photograph or a sketch, can serve as a historiographical document for the writing of a history of an ephemeral art like dance and what are the disadvantages of the use of artistic texts as historiographical documents.

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APPENDIX

*Anthology of Poems about Isadora Duncan*³⁶

La bailarina de los pies desnudos (1907)

Rubén Darío (Metapa, Matagalpa, 1867- León, Nicaragua, 1916)

Iba, en un paso rítmico y felino
a avances dulces, ágiles o rudos,
con algo de animal y de divino
la bailarina de los pies desnudos.

Su falda era la falda de las rosas,
en sus pechos había dos escudos...
Constelada de casos y de cosas...
La bailarina de los pies desnudos.

Bajaban mil deleites de los senos
hacia la perla hundida del ombligo,
e iniciaban propósitos obscenos
azúcares de fresa y miel de higo.

A un lado de la silla gestatoria
estaban mis bufones y mis mudos...
¡Y era toda Selene y Anactoria
la bailarina de los pies desnudos!

Darío, Rubén, 1918. *El canto errante*. Madrid: Mundo Latino, 91-92.

³⁶ Includes the poems of the corpus of work of the present thesis and two additional poems that are relevant to the subject of poetry about Isadora Duncan: 'Isadora Duncan' (1911) by John Collier and 'Isadora (To her Six Dancers)' (1920) by Witter Bynner.

Isadora Duncan (1911)

John Collier (Birthplace? 1884-Place of death? 1968)

I

The Modern Age

We bless you for the mighty Thought you bring,
And for the dumb despairs your motions thrill
To such glad life as in our dreams may sing,
And which is singing still.

We bless you for the token to us all
You flash'd on our raised vision, through the dust
Of staggering hours. O Lode-Star beautiful
In skies that are not lost!

O'er road that is not lost. O'er April lands
Where rains dance through the tide of human flowers,
And sunrise, and the work of human hands
Fulfil unspeakable hours!

Oh not a dream! Though when you went away
Such silence fell as long we had not known,
Who had forgotten Silence in the fray—
Oh out silence grown,

And from your dancing, from the awakening reed
Of unheard music, from beckoning hand
Of your sweet summons, rise the desires that lead
Into your land, our land!

II

The personal cry

Oh you bring anguish to
Our weariness,
We who uprise to you,
Weeping, to bless!

Lo, Isadora! We
Out of our doom,
See your eternity,
Thirst for your bloom:

We who can only live,
Bridges between
All that you have give—
Worlds that have been,

Worlds only quickening
Now on the sky—
Out of our hope they swing
Measurelessly!

III

The world's great age

“The world's great age begins anew.”
Planted in melody
Where pale and fair morning grew
In a forgotten sky,
Came life: and still those faint fields are
Germinal beneath the morning star;
(And under starlight lies the sea
And worlds of yonder mystery)

“The world's great age begins anew.”
Oh it was yesterday
The flute of Grecian morning blew,
And on a shining way
The world's great age was morning light.
The fell the rhythm, then came the night:
(Yet, starless, moved the music-stream,
Far-thundering through dark deeps of dream.)

And came the night with deeper tone,
Whose trembling spires touched the stars,
And sweet and stern was music grown,
And in a middle night of wars
And vast discordancies, desire
Was changed and sought dark heaven like fire;
(And on the yearning ocean-flood
In wonder came the gleam of God.)

“The world’s great age begins anew.”
Lo, Daughter of the Dawn,
The rhythm is fulfilled in you,
And primal life hath gone
Through day and dark, and winged with flame
And subtler, it is still the same:
(And on the flood, in surge and fire,
Your music is a world’s desire!)

Collier, John, 1911. *The Indwelling Splendor*. Johnsville, Pa.: The Stone House Press, 8-10.

Isadora Duncan Dancing (1914)
(Iphigenia in Aulis)

Louis Untermeyer (New York City, 1885-Newtown, 1977)

I

Fling the stones and let them all
Lie;
Take a breath, and toss the ball
High—
And before it strikes the floor
Of the hoar and aged shore,
Sweep them up, though there should be
Even more than two or three.
Add a pebble, then once more
Fling the stones and let them all
Lie;
Take a breath, and toss the ball
High....

II

Rises now the sound of ancient chants
And the circling figure moves more slowly.
Thus the stately gods themselves must dance
While the world grows rapturous and holy.
Thus the gods might weave a great Romance
Singing to the sighs of flute and psalter;
Till the last of all the many chants,
And the priestess sinks before the altar.

III

Cease, oh cease the murmured singing;
Hush the numbers brave or blithe,
For she enters gravely swinging,
Lowering and lithe—
Dark and vengeful as the ringing
Scythe meets scythe.
While the flame is fiercely sweeping
All her virgin airs depart;
She is, without smiles and weeping
Or a maiden's art,
Stern and savage as the leaping
Heart meets heart!

IV

Now the tune grows frantic,
Now the torches flare—
Wild and corybantic
Echoes fill the air.
With a sudden sally
All the voices shout;
And the bacchic rally
Turns into a rout.
Here is life that surges
Through each burning vein;
Here is joy that purges
Every creeping pain.
Even sober Sadness
Casts aside her pall,
Till with buoyant madness
She must swoon and fall...

Untermeyer, Louis, 1914. *Challenge*. New York City: Century Company, 83-85. [online]. Available from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34001/34001-h/34001-h.htm> [Accessed 15 March 2020].

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Dickson, Edward, comp., 1921. *Poems of Dance*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 243-245.

Isadora Duncan Dancing (1914)
(Chopin)

Louis Untermeyer (New York City, 1885-Newtown, 1977)

Faint preludings on a flaute
And she swims before us;
Shadows follow in pursuit,
Like a phantom chorus.
Sense and sound are intertwined
Through her necromancy,
Till our dreaming souls are blind
To all things but fancy.

Haunted woods and perfumed nights,
Swift and soft desires;
Roses violet-colored lights,
And the sound of lyres;
Vague chromatics on a flute –
All are subtly blended
Till the instrument grows mute
And the dance is ended.

Untermeyer, Louis, 1914. *Challenge*. New York City: Century Company, 86-87. [online] Available from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34001/34001-h/34001-h.htm> [Accessed 15 March 2020].

Fragos, Emily, sel. and ed., 2006. *The Dance*. London: Everyman's Library, 134.

Raftis, Alkis, comp., 2006. *Dance in Poetry: An International Anthology of Poems on Dance*. New Jersey: Princeton Book Company Publishers, 155.

To Isadora Duncan (1917)

John Cowper Powys (Derbyshire, 1872-Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1963)

With the gesture of a god,
You gave me back my youth;
And a scent of violets
Overflowed the world.
With the gesture of a god.
You gave me back my love,
And tears deeper than tears
Overflowed my heart.
With the gesture of a god,
You trampled on fate,
You lifted up on high
Those that had fallen —
All the oppressed,
All the humiliated,
All the offended;
You lifted them up on high
And they were comforted.
With the gesture of a god,
You wrestled with Demogorgon;
You brought hope back
And freedom and triumph
To those whom the world had crushed.
All of us, sitting in darkness,
Saw a great light.
You danced as dance the morning stars
And the universe was conquered.
You smote the universe in the mouth;
And you saved us —
You — a woman.

Cowper Powys, John, 1917. *Mandragora Poems*. New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 71.

Dickson, Edward, comp., 1921. *Poems of Dance*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 193-194.

Isadora Duncan (1918)

Max Eastman (New York City, 1883-Bridgetown, 1969)

You bring the fire and terror of the wars
Of infidels in thunder-running hordes,
With spears like sun-rays, shields, and wheeling
swords
Flame shape, death shape and shaped like scimi-
tars,
With crimson eagles and blue pennantry,
And teeth and armor flashing, and white eyes
Of battle horses, and the silver cries
Of trumpets unto storm and victory!

Who is this naked-footed lovely girl
Of summer meadows dancing on the grass?
So young and tenderly her footsteps pass,
So dreamy-limbed and lightly wild and warm—
The bugles murmur and the banners furl,
And they are lost and vanished like a storm!

Eastman, Max, 1918. *Colors of Life. Poems and Songs and Sonnets*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 81.

Dickson, Edward, ed., 1921. *Poems of Dance*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 107.

An Ode to a Dancer (1920)
(Isadora Duncan)

Witter Bynner (New York, 1881-Santa Fe, 1968)

O Keats, thy Grecian urn has been upturned
And from its ashes is a woman made,
To dance them back again as when they burned
In young antiquity and pipes were played !
And who that early woman was that danced
Them dead, thou, Keats, were born too late to know
And born too early for her later birth.
And yet thy lips of poesy could blow
Both lives, until their ankles met and glanced
Between the dead world and the unborn earth.

Here is thy living witness from the dead,
With the garment and the measure and the grace
Of a Greek maid, with the daisies on her head
And the daring of a new world in her face.
Dancing, she walks in perfect sacrifice. . . .
Dancing, she lifts her beauty in her hands
And bears it to the altar, as a sign
Of joy in all the waters and the lands.
And while she praises with her pure device,
The breath she dances with, O Keats, is thine !

Life rises rippling through her like a spring,
Or like a stream it flows with deepening whirl.
Leaves in a wind taught her that fluttering
Of finger-tips. She moves, a rosy girl
Caught in a rain of love; a prophetess
Of dust struck on the instant dumb with pain;
A lovely melancholy being, wild
With remembering, with groping to attain
The edge and entrance of a wilderness,
To play again, untroubled as a child.

She strikes at death. But the escaping foe
Awaits unwearied, knowing every wile.
Forward she comes to take the final blow—
And in defeat defies him with her smile. . . .
Upward she bears her throat to the keen thrust
Of triumph :— *“O ye gods of time who give
And take, ye makers of beauty, though I die
In this my body, —beauty still shall live
Because of me and my Immortal dust!—
O urn ! Take back my ashes! It is I !”*

Bynner, Witter, 1920. *A Canticle of Pan and Other Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 149-150.

Dickson, Edward, comp., 1921. *Poems of Dance*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 85-86.

Isadora (1920)
(To her six dancers)

Witter Bynner (New York, 1881-Santa Fe, 1968)

Beauty came out of the early world,
Her hyacinthine hair still curled,
Her robe still white on auroral limbs ;
And her body sang the self-same hymns
It long ago had sung to the morn
When death gave birth and love was born.

And once again her presence proved,
As most immortally she moved,
That in her meditative eye
The child of death can never die
But dances with inspired feet
On every hill, in every street.

She raised her hand - and Irma came,
Theresa, Lisel, each like a flame,
Anna, Erica, Gretel: the tread
Of life still dying, never dead. . . .
And like a bird-song in a wood,
Within their very heart she stood.

Bynner, Wytter, 1920. *A Canticle of Pan and Other Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 151.

Dickson, Edward, ed., 1921. *Poems of Dance*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 84.

To Isadora Duncan, Dancing (1924)

Joel Elias Spingarn (New York City, 1875-1939)

In the crowded theater, home of painted
faces,
Came the West Wind, breathing joy and life
and freshness,
Came the Springtime, making winter warm
with dreaming—
Came (to thrill our pulses) Isadora Duncan.
There we saw you—while our breath took
shape in woman—
Marry human motion to immortal music.

Long ago the heathen black folk of the jungle
Called you goddess, long ago the grey Egyp-
tians
Carved an altar for you in their towering
temples;
Long ago, in rite and myth, the Greek en-
shrined you;
Dance of Shiva, dance of Hopi, dance of
Dervish,
All the planets whirl with you along their orbits.

Dance, and let tired eyes, weary of seeing
only
Feed for once their fill upon immortal mu-
sic;
Dance, and let the dreams of poets half for-
gotten,
Speak through you as never spoke their
printed pages;

Dance, and let the canvas of the
Painter
Move and speak and breath and tear our
quicken heartstrings;
Dance, and in the throbbing flow of rhythm
and gesture,
Music, poetry and painting melt together.

Dance, and let tired eyes, weary of seeing only
Feed for once their fill upon immortal music;
Dance, and let the pictured visions of the painters

Move and speak and breath and tear our quickened
heart-strings;
Dance, and in the throbbing joy of rhythm and gesture,
Music, poetry, and painting melt together.

Now I know the power, understand the secret,
Why the old religious took you to their bosom,
Wound themselves about you, called your magic sacred ,
Why we moderns, lacking faith, have lived without you:
While you dance, once more the Aegean dances with
you;
All the heathen black folk whisper secrets to you;
On the western plains the red man stops and listens;
Gods and idols, faith and beauty, always craving
Human motion married to immortal music.

Spingarn, Joel Elias, 1924. *Poems*. New York City: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 12-14.

Earlier version published in:
Dickson, Edward, comp., 1921. *Poems of Dance*. New York City: A. A. Knopf, 218.

Isadora Duncan (1978, posthumous work)

Carl Sandburg (Illinois, 1878-Falt Rock 1967)

She was a flame sheath of flesh made for dancing.
She believed she ran out into storm, rain, sun, and
became part of them and they were afterward woven
in her dances.

“The wind? I am the wind. The sea and the moon?
I am the sea and the moon. Tears, pain, love, bird-
flights? I am all of them. I dance what I am.
“Sin, prayer, faith, the light that never was on land
or sea? I dance what I am.”

Roses, lovers, money, children, came to her in her
life dance from California to Russia.
When her dancing days were not yet over but almost
come to an end, she died in a swift ride with a flame-red
scarf enwrapping her neck tighter and tighter. . . .

Sandburg, Carl, 1978. *Breathing Tokens*. ed. Margaret Sandburg. New York City: Harcourt Brace
Jovanovich, 60.

Raftis, Alkis, comp., 2006. *Dance in Poetry: An International Anthology of Poems on Dance*. New
Jersey: Princeton Book Company Publishers, 133.

From *El espejo del cuerpo* (1980)

David Huerta (Mexico City, 1949)

La bufanda de Isadora Duncan se trueca en el recuerdo

de la fiesta cinética ¿o cinegética? ¿Quién se mueve
para cazar a quién?

La velocidad y la bufanda
Cazaron a Isadora, en el auto deportivo. En el
Museo de Atenas, las ánforas se estremecen con
una risa trágica. Cazar el propio cuerpo, darle
“a la caza alcance”, dominar a la señora muerte
que no sabe bailar, suspirante siniestra, loba atroz.

Huerta, David. 1980. *El espejo del cuerpo*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México,
29.

Isadora (1983)

Armando Rubio Huidobro (1955- Santiago de Chile, 1980)

Isadora Duncan baila
en un café de París,
y un soldado arroja
la primera granada del catorce.

Aún se disputan la Tierra los hombres,
y renacen
sordos los clamores imperiales.

Con buen ojo el fabricante
arroja al mercado soldados de plomo,
y el cielo se puebla de pájaros extraños
y se incendia el mar en artificios.

En Siberia cae la nieve sobre los zares,
y el mundo se asombra en los periódicos,
y las dueñas de casa recuerdan a Penélope.

Los hijos de Isadora
van por el Sena durmiendo,
y ella recuerda a su madre
que naufraga en las artesas
de algún suburbio de Nueva York.

Isadora danza descalza
con el último príncipe de Italia.
Isadora baila con el pueblo,
y el pobre señor Singer, amo de sastres y modistas,
rompe nuevamente los cristales de su casa,
y los invitados huyen despavoridos al aeropuerto.
El hombre admite en los estrados
que la paz es negociable.
Pero ya la Tierra echó a rodar
su cauce decidido.
Ya la rueda enzarza el cuello
majestuoso de Isadora:
el último galán se la lleva,
y le ha puesto rojo beso en la bufanda.

Allá va gloriosa la granada
a socavar la arena.
A Isadora la esperan
sus hijos en el Sena;
los muertos de la guerra;
Esenin, el poeta.
Allá Nueva York erige sus piedras
entre heráldicas humaredas.
Pero Isadora baila en las trincheras.
¡Isadora Duncan está danzando por toda la tierra!

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